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The superstar rapper talks about life after Migos, Takeoff's death and his marriage to Cardi B

BY JANEÉ BOLDEN AND JEM ASWAD

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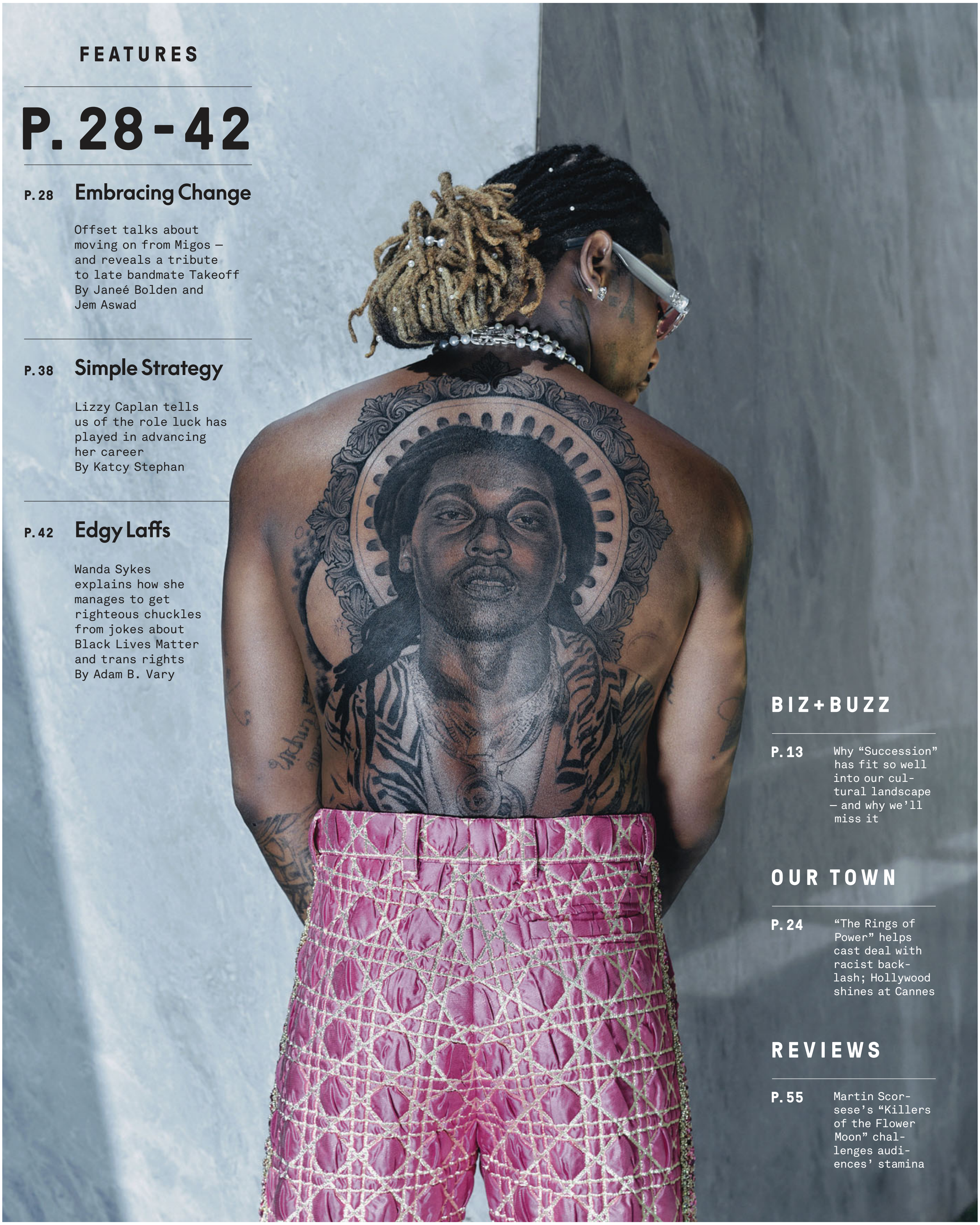

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Beyond Bad and Boujee! Offset's Ready for a New Era

CO-EDITORS-IN-CHIEF

Cynthia Littleton

Ramin Setoodeh

It's usually a disaster for a journalist when a famous person cuts an interview short. In April, Janeé Bolden and Jem Aswad spent the evening with Offset at one of his houses. He was keen to talk about the next chapter in his music career until the conversation turned to his former collaborator Takeoff, the late rapper who made up a third of the hip-hop group Migos until he was shot and killed at a Houston bowling alley in 2022. Offset briefly spoke about the death of his longtime friend; then he had to leave the room to collect himself. And that was the end of the night.

Fortunately, Offset invited our team back to his house the next day to continue talking about his evolution — as an artist, a father and the husband of Cardi B. The resulting profile is an illuminating portrait of one of the music industry's biggest risk-takers who is on the cusp of reinvention.

This issue features many other great reads — from Adam B. Vary's interview with Wanda Sykes to Katcy Stephan's profile of Lizzy Caplan, the "Masters of Sex" actress who could find herself back in the Emmy race with "Fleishman Is in Trouble," to our TV critic Alison Herman's thoughts on the end of "Succession." Who will hold the keys to the Waystar Royco kingdom? We're as eager as you are to tune in on Sunday night to bid farewell to the feuding Roy family.

And as the writers strike continues in Los Angeles and New York, we take you to the south of France, where we conclude our in-depth coverage of the Cannes Film Festival with Brent Lang and Matt Donnelly's top takeaways from the most glamorous movie gathering in the world. This year our reporters covered deals, toasted auteurs, rubbed shoulders with Leonardo DiCaprio and Martin Scorsese and even partied with the Weeknd until 3 a.m. following the premiere of his TV series "The Idol." This was one of our most successful Cannes festivals in terms of our reach and coverage, and we applaud you — with a standing ovation — for following along.

Contributors

Executive editor of music **Jem Aswad** braved not one but two Hollywood Hills mansions for this week's Offset cover story. He has profiled the Weeknd, Billie Eilish, Bruce Springsteen and Dua Lipa and Elton John for the magazine.

Janeé Bolden was one of the first people to see Offset's Takeoff tribute tattoo and bonded with the rapper over their shared Atlanta roots. She previously profiled Future, Muni Long and Latto for *Variety*.

Social media editor **Katcy Stephan** grabbed coffee with "Fatal Attraction" star Lizzy Caplan for this week's issue. No bunnies were harmed.

"I am reminded how much I love what I do when I get to work with artists like Offset," says **Mason Poole**, who photographed the rapper in Los Angeles on March 10. "The shoot felt more like a day off with creative friends — it was fun and relaxed and loose."

Littleton: Photograph by Dan Doperalski; Setoodeh: Photograph by Alexi Lubomirski; Jem Aswad; George Chinsee

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'Succession' Showed Us the Money

The HBO show dissected the lives of the ultrarich, and we couldn't stop watching

Cox: Borja B. Hojas/Getty Images; Strong/Snook: HBO (2); Culkin: Theo Wargo/Getty Images

By Alison Herman

At the close of its fourth and final season, "Succession" occupies a place eerily analogous to that of fearsome patriarch Logan Roy. After Logan's sudden, shocking death in the third episode, his colleagues and children (who were also his colleagues) had to scramble for an answer to the question that's haunted the entire series: What — or rather, who — now? "Succession" itself is set to leave a Logan-sized hole in the cultural landscape, with its fan base asking the same question.

"Jennifer Garner, a wonderfully natural and instinctive actress"

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Grief brings Kendall (Jeremy Strong), Siobhan (Sarah Snook) and Roman (Kieran Culkin) together.

The future is impossible to predict, as "Succession" so beautifully showed with its anticlimactic, out-of-nowhere take on Logan's demise. Ahead of the May 28 series finale, however, we can look back on what made the show such an era-defining, Emmy-dominating hit. "Succession" is hardly the first to explore the inner lives of the ultrarich. But at the end of its run, it stands out as the least glamorous and most realistic of the genre. It's also the most effective as social commentary: By zooming in on the Roys' claustrophobic bubble and toxic family dynamic, "Succession" speaks to the world they helped shape in their image.

The mark of an all-time TV character is a portrait so complete it feels four-dimensional, with their quirks, traumas and complexes so established the viewer can envision how they'd react in some unseen situation. Over the course of "Succession," creator Jesse Armstrong and his collaborators turned each of the Roys and their cronies into people we can, if not *like*, at least feel we deeply understand — more so, in fact, than their real-life inspirations. Armstrong famously penned an unproduced script about the Murdoch family before signing on with HBO. (The network had made its mark with "The Sopranos," a story about a different kind of family business; with "Succession," it would update the formula for the age of Fox News.) But by making the Roys an amalgam of dynastic wealth, from the Trumps to the Kennedys to everyone in between, "Succession" could pick and choose reference points to work into a more specific, original story. The result is a more convincing psychological profile of the .0001% than any attempt to peer inside the private lives of public figures we'll never truly know.

The eponymous question that's driven "Succession," at least on the surface, is who will take over from Logan as CEO of the sprawling media empire Waystar Royco. Will it be Kendall, the longtime heir apparent prone to mania and substance abuse? Will it be Roman, the puerile edgelord who may have the mean streak to do what Kendall can't? Will it be Siobhan, the faux-feminist smart enough to forge her own path until she suddenly, disastrously isn't? Could it even be Connor, their older half-brother largely content to play with his Napoleon relics and finance his escort girlfriend's (now wife's) awful plays? Or Cousin Greg, the oafish hanger-on, or Tom Wambsgans, Shiv's social-climbing, Greg-abusing husband with a surprisingly sensitive side? From season to season, episode to episode and even scene to scene, the contenders passed front-runner status back and forth like a hot potato.

The guessing game drew such intense interest thanks to a uniformly excellent cast, many so relatively unknown that, with the help of their considerable talent, they all but became their characters in the eyes of viewers. Jeremy Strong, whose acting style was so immersive it occasioned an unflattering profile in The New Yorker, *was* Kendall. Brian Cox gave cranky comments about Strong to the press, creating the impression the Roys' Oedipal struggle extended beyond the screen set. As Tom, Matthew Macfadyen managed to erase all memory of no less an iconic role than Mr. Darcy of "Pride and Prejudice," instead delivering a more transactional, twisted take on romantic love.

But "Succession," both premise and show, has been something of a bait-and-switch. Whoever ends up in the corner office will be left with Logan's personal legacy, not just his professional one. The real issue is not who can or should replace Logan. It's whether the surviving Roys can overcome the violent, selfish, abrasive hand they've been dealt or if, as Kendall posits to his sister in a recent episode, "the poison drips through." This exchange takes place in the office, because there are no boundaries between the family and the company that bears their name. It's an elision at the heart of their privilege and problems alike: All the Roys' relationships are fruit, to borrow Kendall's metaphor, of the same poisoned tree.

Waystar Wisdom

"Boar on the floor!"
— LOGAN (S2, E3)

"If it is to be said, so it be — so it is."
— COUSIN GREG (S2, E9)

"Buckle up, fucklehead!"
— TOM TO GREG (S1, E8)

"Because my dad told me to."
— KENDALL (S2, E2)

"We hear for you."
— TOM (S2, E6)

"They make a Cajun chicken linguine just how I like it."
— COUSIN GREG (S1, E6)

"Money wins."
— LOGAN (S2, E5)

Contributors: Kate Aurthur, William Earl, Alison Herman, Katcy Stephan

"Succession" is a tragedy because breaking the cycle of familial abuse has always been a pipe dream; "Succession" is a comedy because of *how* the show illustrates that truth. The diamond-sharp scripts are an indelible mix of erudition — bags aren't big, they're "ludicrously capacious" — and inarticulate bluster, the Roys stammering in strings of "ums" and "yeahs." The direction, established by Adam McKay in the pilot and then led by executive producer Mark Mylod, is hyperactive and deliberately un-stylized, focusing on anxious, greedy people rather than the gorgeous spaces they inhabit. Visually, the show looks more like a vérité-style cringe sitcom (such as "The Thick of It," where Armstrong once worked as a writer) than an escapist fantasy.

A vicious sense of humor has helped "Succession" dodge potential accusations of glamorizing the plutocratic Roys. It also has captured a more truthful snapshot of capitalism at its most cruel, one with insights that will endure well beyond the series' conclusion. Season 4's penultimate episode is titled "Church and State," as in "separation of." The irony of the name, and the show, is that there is no separation, and never was. "Succession" was never just funny or sad, or just about any one theme — the media, inequality, trauma, America, take your pick. The show was everything bundled up together, just as it always is.

Succession: HBO; Cox: Michael Campanella/Getty Images; Braun: Don Arnold/Getty Images; Macfadyen: Frazer Harrison/Getty Images; Strong: Chelsea Guglielmino/Getty Images

"A PERFECTLY EXECUTED COMEDY."

Los Angeles Times

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The Cannes Diaries

From Johnny Depp's return to Scorsese's triumph, five takeaways from the festival at midpoint

By Brent Lang and Matt Donnelly

There's just something about Cannes.

No film festival can rival it for delivering old-school Hollywood glamour. And the 76th edition hasn't suffered from a lack of star power during its first half, with Leonardo DiCaprio, Julianne Moore and Natalie Portman all shining on the red carpet.

But Cannes isn't just an opportunity to see the biggest actors on the planet on the biggest stage in moviedom. It's also a chance to take stock of the industry and the challenges it faces. There's no graver one, certainly, than the Writers Guild strike that's put the TV and movie business in a holding pattern, along with the possibility that actors and directors will join the picket lines when their contracts expire in June. So for all the glitziness of the premieres, there's also an underlying anxiety. Will the good times last much longer?

1 Johnny Depp Makes a Comeback (Kinda)

Having scored a major victory after a Virginia court ruled in his favor in his defamation suit against ex-wife Amber Heard, Depp was hoping to use Cannes and the premiere of "Jeanne du Barry" as a launching pad for a return. And the results are … mixed. The crowd at the festival showered Depp with a seven-minute ovation on opening night. But at the press conference the following day, his answers to reporters asking about the cloud that still hangs over him could've used some work. They were bizarre and rambling. One U.S. distributor summed up the difficulties facing the actor when asked if their company would buy "Jeanne du Barry": "I'm not touching anything with Johnny Depp in it."

2 Auteur de Force

It's hard to predict what will pop at a film festival. This year at Cannes, the overwhelming feeling on the ground is the strength of the lineup's visionary directors. After a 10-year hiatus, Jonathan Glazer came storming back with "The Zone of Interest," an unnerving look at the domestic lives of a Nazi family living in the shadow of Auschwitz. And he had company among the auteur set. Todd Haynes brought sexy subversiveness with "May December," while Martin Scorsese scored with "Killers of the Flower Moon." This Cannes the brightest stars may be the ones behind the camera.

3 Slow (or Silent?) Marche

Cannes isn't just a place to premiere movies; it's also a great setting to sell them. Yet sales agents warned *Variety* that the market would be quiet this year. Announcing multimillion-dollar sales of finished films and star packages would be disruptive and disrespectful of picketing writers. Indeed, movement around sales has been slower than a French waiter. Haynes' "May December" scored an $11 million deal from Netflix, but that's the rare success story. Elsewhere, projects like Dave Bautista's "Cooler," Sylvester Stallone's "Cliffhanger" reboot and Nicolas Cage's "Lords of War" still need a home.

4 Indiana Jones Is Ready to Retire

Harrison Ford is bidding farewell to the globe-trotting archaeologist who made him a cinema icon. But based on the tepid reaction to "Indiana Jones and the Dial of Destiny," he should have hung up the fedora long ago. The reviews were lukewarm, and while the movie received a standing ovation, it felt more obligatory than enthusiastic.

5 Opulence Is Back … but Perhaps Not for Long

Cannes is synonymous with elegance, and that doesn't come cheap. Vanity Fair, Warner Bros. Discovery and amfAR all threw extravagant bashes at the Hotel du Cap-Eden-Roc in nearby Antibes. Studios shelled out to bring "Asteroid City" and "Killers of the Flower Moon" to France. That's a lot of hair and makeup, hotel and transportation fees. All of these costs come as media conglomerates lay off tens of thousands of people, share prices get battered as Wall Street sours on streaming, and the WGA is holding out for better terms. Frugality may cut into the fromage next year.

Jeanne du Barry: Stéphanie Branchu/Why Not Productions; Killers Of The Flower Moon: Stephane Cardinale/Getty Images; Indiana Jones: Jonathan Olley/Lucasfilm Ltd.; Campbell/Turki: Daniele Venturelli/Getty Images

Family Affair

Sebastian Maniscalco carries his first movie, 'About My Father,' with Robert De Niro playing his dad

By Matt Donnelly

Sebastian Maniscalco and Robert De Niro in "About My Father"

Dan Anderson/Lionsgate

On a recent quiet morning at The Summit, the ultra-exclusive gated community in Los Angeles, a crane was called to deliver olive trees to Sebastian Maniscalco's house.

The Illinois native, known for relatable stand-up about his immigrant parents, and for his onstage physicality and boisterousness, went uncharacteristically silent watching the evergreens drop down on his stunning views of Beverly Hills. He's used to talking about his much humbler roots.

"I like to poke fun or make light of what we see in society and make fun of my own family and my old-world immigrant upbringing. I think I do it in a way where we're all laughing together," he tells *Variety*.

Maniscalco's father, Salvatore, emigrated from Sicily at age 15, getting a beautician's license to support his wife and kids with cut-and-dye jobs in a suburban salon. He is the inspiration for "About My Father," a new comedy in which Robert De Niro assumes the role of Salvatore. It opens on May 26.

Viewers of Maniscalco's six stand-up specials, most of which are streaming on Netflix, will instantly recognize his dad's patina. "If the sun is out, a man should be working," Sebastian quotes him as saying in an opening montage. The film is pseudo-biographical, following on-screen Sebastian's courtship with a WASP-y artist (Leslie Bibb) and her intimidating politician mother (Kim Cattrall). He and De Niro are invited for a country club family weekend, and the cultural differences pour out faster than Tom Collins mix.

"My dad saw the film about six weeks ago. He cried. He's my biggest fan and biggest critic. Living in Los Angeles, a lot of people are sycophants. Where I grew up, people see through all that shit. My dad is harsh, but it keeps me honest and on the level," says Maniscalco, sitting in his home office. He radiates a handsome mischievousness, with the intimidating presence of a nightclub bouncer. But there's a contradiction here. He's a man who will cry at Hallmark commercials but also rumble in a parking lot.

Maniscalco moved to L.A. in his early 20s to work the comedy club circuit while bartending at the Four Seasons. He refused to conform to the hotel's refined formality ("Good morning, sir. Good evening, sir," he remembers being asked to chant), and his laid-back attitude made him memorable to guests like Jerry Seinfeld. Fifteen years later, he's playing stadium tours and making a significant step up in Hollywood. In addition to "About My Father," he's just finished production on "How to Be a Bookie," an HBO Max comedy co-starring Charlie Sheen and created by Chuck Lorre. He sees the projects as an opportunity to expand his core stand-up audience.

"Globally, TV and film will introduce my comedy to a broader audience. I've been wanting to do this creatively, and as a business move," he says. "I wanted to share a love letter to my father and, in doing so, inject some of my point of view. Whether you know me or not, I think the movie gives a good sense of who I am."

Maniscalco admits he was intimidated by film as a medium, saying stand-up allows him to "work a room for an hour and get the laughs. With a movie, I'm doing the takes and getting nothin'. It was hard to wrap my head around that."

While he hopes "About My Father" will be a box office hit — a challenge for comedies releasing in theaters in recent years — Maniscalco believes he's already won. "I grew up watching De Niro. I had his posters on my wall. And now he's playing my dad?" he says. "My kids are going to see this someday. It's already a success."

Salvatore also got a few perks, having spent time teaching De Niro how to do the perfect dye job. But that's an entirely different set of roots.

Daveed Diggs Is No Imitation Crab

How the Tony winner found his own voice for Sebastian in 'The Little Mermaid'

By Angelique Jackson

Austin Hargrave

In 1989, the 7-year-old Daveed Diggs queued up outside Oakland's Grand Lake Theatre, his hometown multiplex, to see "The Little Mermaid" with his father, Dountes.

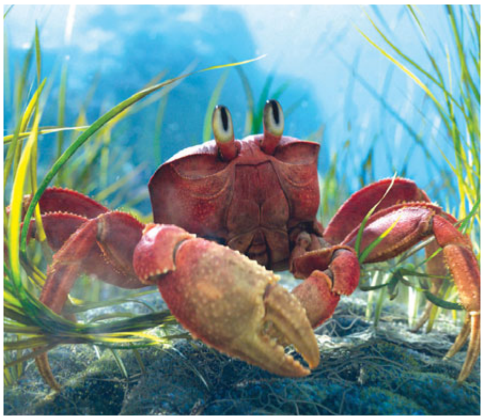
"It must've been opening weekend. The line wrapped around the block," Diggs recalls. "I remember loving Scuttle, thinking he was just the funniest thing I'd seen up to that point, and loving the songs."

Thirty years later, Diggs is a Tony- and Grammy-winning actor, rapper and filmmaker, best known for "Blindspotting" (both the 2018 film and the Starz series) and "Hamilton," where he delighted Broadway audiences by putting his unique imprint on Thomas Jefferson and the Marquis de Lafayette. After playing those historical figures night after night, one might imagine he'd have no qualms about taking on another well-known character — the calypso-singing crab Sebastian in Disney's live-action "The Little Mermaid," which opens on May 26.

But Diggs' insecurities — much like Sebastian's persistent worries — nearly got the best of him. When his reps called to say director Rob Marshall wanted him to audition, Diggs tried to pass, believing the filmmakers were just asking to be nice. After workshopping a couple scenes and songs with Marshall and producer John DeLuca, he still didn't think he'd get the part. "It took a long time to register," Diggs says.

That's because whenever he imagined Sebastian, Diggs would hear stage and screen star Samuel E. Wright's Jamaican-accented baritone. "That performance is a thing that sits with me," Diggs says in wonder at the prospect of a shared legacy with the actor who voiced the role in the 1989 animated classic. "I don't know if this [version] is gonna work like that for kids — we'll see."

Once he overcame his anxieties, Diggs dove into creating the character — as he does for our Zoom conversation hours before the film's U.K. premiere. For the occasion he's wearing a deep-red suit with a seabed pattern and a fishbone brooch affixed to his jacket. He says he was detailed and deliberate when developing the accent for Sebastian. In a tribute to Wright's performance, his crustacean is from the Caribbean too. But the voice has a Trinidadian tinge, influenced by the late playwright Tony Hall, a native of the island, who schooled Diggs on calypso history before he died in 2020.



Daveed Diggs gave Sebastian's voice a Trinidadian tinge.

"Vocally, what we ended up on is a nod to the Sebastian that everybody knows and loves but also is what my voice is capable of doing, both singing and speaking," Diggs says. "It was this process of trying things out with the various coaches to get a thing that feels consistent with who this crab is."

Key to the character's personality is his musical ability. Sure, Ariel — the titular mermaid — is the star, but Sebastian steals the show with two major numbers, "Under the Sea" and "Kiss the Girl." "Under the Sea" was particularly daunting given that Diggs isn't a trained vocalist. "I was super nervous about it," Diggs admits, but in rehearsals, Marshall and composer Alan Menken encouraged him to make it his own. "If I ever did anything that deviated from the original, Alan and Rob would smile" — his cue to keep going. As for recording the track with Bailey — Ariel provides background vocals in the updated arrangement — Diggs has one word: "Unfair."

"You're not competing with that voice," Diggs says, chuckling. "She just happened to be in the room when we were recording, and [Menken] was like, 'Get in there and riff.' I said, 'C'mon man, really? Can I have a moment?' But it's my favorite part of the song."

Diggs finally witnessed the fruits of his undersea labors at the film's Los Angeles premiere. Watching the photo-realistic musical felt like sensory overload. "I was crying every time Halle opened her mouth," he says. During the "Under the Sea" scene, he was too captivated by the CGI starfish — whose movement was based on dancers from the Alvin Ailey company — to critique his own vocals: "I was so overwhelmed that it was hard to focus. It took my breath away."

But he's already earning rave reviews from the kids in his life. His best friend's 6-year-old daughter, who attended the premiere, told him how funny she thought Sebastian was, Diggs says, sounding relieved.

As for future musicals, Diggs is letting it flow. "I outpaced my career goals so long ago," he says. "I am in this rare position for an artist where I feel like I've been on a victory lap for quite a while. I feel very, very lucky and get to constantly be surprised by what I might be asked to do — like play an iconic crab." ✓

'THE LITTLE MERMAID'S' NEW GROOVES

Along with fresh updates to classics like "Part of Your World," "Kiss the Girl" and "Under the Sea," the live-action "Little Mermaid" features original tracks, with music by Alan Menken and lyrics by Lin-Manuel Miranda.

"For the First Time"

The scene: Audiences hear what Ariel (Halle Bailey) is thinking as she gets acclimated to the human world, with music that riffs on Menken's score for the 1989 animated movie.

The inspiration: To portray the voiceless mermaid's inner thoughts, director Rob Marshall had Bailey view "Yentl," Barbra Streisand's 1983 musical drama, which frames many of its songs in the protagonist's head. "I could watch how the power of song can still translate through your face," Bailey says.

"Wild Uncharted Waters"

The scene: There's more to Prince Eric (Jonah Hauer-King) than just a pretty face, or his love story with Ariel — he gets his own number too, a '90s-era power ballad that illuminates the young royal's desire to find himself at sea.

The theme: "He's grateful that she saved him, but this girl also represents something more," Hauer-King explains. "It's about being away from the castle. It's about looking outwards."

"The Scuttlebutt"

The scene: The title plays off the slang word for "gossip," which seagull Scuttle (Awkwafina) excels at. Menken composed a Caribbean tune and Miranda wrote the rhymes, which culminate in a back-and-forth speed rap between Scuttle and Sebastian (Daveed Diggs).

The inspiration: "She's so befuddled and never gets thewords together, so a fun thought was let's make it a crazy rap," Marshall says.

"Impossible Child"

The scene: King Triton (Javier Bardem) delivers a solo about the difficult father-daughter relationship between him and Ariel. It landed on the cutting room floor but will appear on a special edition release of the film.

The reason: "The emotional journey that he does at the end would have been given away a little bit if the song was placed [where it was], so it makes sense," Bardem says of Marshall's decision to remove the scene.

EXECUTIVE SHUFFLE

↓

Michael Engleman has been promoted to chief marketing officer for Paramount+ Domestic and Showtime. He had been CMO and global brand director for Showtime.

Nicole Kim has joined Columbia Records as VP of A&R. Kim most recently served as A&R for BigHit Music/HYBE and headed all creative for K-pop superstars BTS.

Vinnie Malhotra has been named president of Higher Ground Prods. He comes to the banner led by former President Barack Obama and Michelle Obama after heading unscripted and documentaries for Showtime Networks.

Kristen Killackey has advanced to VP of production and operations for NBCUniversal Syndication Studios. She started her career with NBCU as a production accountant.

Crab: Disney; Engleman: Terence Patrick; Malhotra: John Russo/Showtime; Killackey: John A. DeMato

Back to the Future With Weird Al

The master of pop culture parody crashes the Emmy race

By Michael Schneider

Photograph by Dan Doperalski

AWARDS CIRCUIT

Let's travel back to the summer of 1989. I'm 15 years old and have just put two large movie posters on my wall: one for Tim Burton's game-changing take on "Batman," starring Michael Keaton, and the other for "UHF," the theatrical comedy debut for the one and only "Weird Al" Yankovic.

It's now 2023. Keaton is back as Batman in next month's "The Flash." And Weird Al (always Weird Al, not Yankovic!) is the front-runner for the TV movie Emmy, thanks to the Roku Channel parody biopic "Weird: The Al Yankovic Story."

"1989 is back again! It's all cyclical," Yankovic says in his signature cheery, upbeat tone. Tell my 15-year-old self that one day he'd be recording a podcast with Weird Al, and first he'd say, "What's a podcast?" But after explaining that it's essentially a radio show, my 15-year-old self would lose his mind. And ask about 2023's flying cars. Sorry, kid.

But back to Al. This is a guy who has spent five decades in the limelight — far longer than many of the artists he has parodied over the years. "Nobody wanted to sign me in the early '80s," he says. "They thought, 'Comedy music — you're a novelty artist.' And historically, novelty artists become one-hit wonders, and then they're forgotten quickly. So yeah, that's kind of the big irony of my life is, I'm still here."

Weird Al is so timeless that he has managed to play the 1980s version of himself on shows like "How I Met Your Mother" and "The Goldbergs," and get away with it. In "Weird," Daniel Radcliffe plays Al — but Yankovic is there too, appearing as record company exec Tony Scotti (the guy who gave him his first record deal).

Make no mistake: This is by no means an actual biopic. Of course the master of parody would ultimately make a parody of biopics: Despite what you see on-screen, Weird Al didn't have a torrid love affair with Madonna. He didn't become a drug kingpin. And Dr. Demento never laced Al's guacamole with LSD.

"It brought me so much joy to see that was the No. 1 Google search: 'Did Weird Al and Madonna have a fling?' or whatever. I don't know if Madonna is even aware of this movie," he says. "I'm very curious what she thinks. ... I hope she's OK with it."

Weird Al famously always got permission from artists before parodying their songs — which is why he didn't get to do his take on anything from Prince's catalog. But when it came to the movie, "our lawyers said, 'Don't worry about it.' Public figure."

Apparently, a number of viewers have taken "Weird" as a true chronicle of his life, despite the sheer absurdity of where the story ends up going. "I've learned about the internet and the general population — no matter how ironic and obviously insincere you're being, somebody's going to believe it," he chuckles.

Or maybe just want to believe it. In my youth, I used to live for the moments when Weird Al would show up on MTV, under the illusion that he had hacked into the network to broadcast his own "AL TV." I knew it was a marketing stunt, but I loved the audacity of the idea that Al had barged into the studios to play novelty music videos and fake, doctored interviews with celebrities.

"They basically gave me the keys to the car," he remembers. "They'd say, 'Hey, you've got four hours — do whatever you want.' Literally! They didn't give me any money, but they gave me complete freedom, which was amazing."

Take it from me: The 1980s were a weird time. Thankfully, at least one icon from that era still is: the forever weird Al Yankovic.

SKYDANCE

CONGRATULATES
OUR SECOND UNIT DIRECTOR

GARRETT WARREN

FOR HIS INSPIRED WORK
ON OUR FEATURE FILM
ghosted

THANK YOU GARRETT!

OUR TOWN

JUST FOR VARIETY

by Marc Malkin

"The Lord of the Rings: The Rings of Power" star **Ismael Cruz Córdova** (1) is opening up about the cast and crew's mental health while shooting the Amazon Prime Video series. During an appearance on this week's "Just for Variety" podcast, the actor tells me that an on-set therapist was on hand to offer help after the show received racist backlash against its inclusive and diverse casting. "You need support when this happens because the voices are so loud and they're coming at you from so many places," Córdova says.

Córdova, who is shooting Season 2 in the U.K., says the therapist's presence alone was beneficial. "I loved seeing her there, even if we didn't speak," he said. "I knew there was someone there seeing me completely. It wasn't just as an actor."

• • •

Is there going be a musical episode of "Only Murders in the Building" in Season 3?! While it hasn't been officially confirmed that **Steve Martin**, **Martin Short** and **Selena Gomez** will be singing and dancing at some point, I recently got a tease from musical impresarios **Marc Shaiman** and **Scott Wittman**. "We've worked on the next season of 'Murders in the Building,'" Shaiman says. "We're not allowed to say anything more than that, but you could probably do that math."

Shaiman and Wittman's latest Broadway extravaganza, a musical adaptation of "Some Like It Hot," earned the most Tony nominations this year with 13 nods. Not only is **Mariah Carey** (2) a producer on the show, but Shaiman says he and the Grammy winner bonded over their love of "Bullets Over Broadway." "She can recite that entire movie verbatim, and she's really funny," he says. "She can play all the parts."

Shaiman also exclusively tells me that he is scoring **Rob Reiner**'s documentary feature about **Albert Brooks** (3).

• • •

"Euphoria" actor **Jacob Elordi** (4) and **Zachary Quinto** (5) star in "He Went That Way," a film based on the wacky true story of celebrity animal trainer Dave Pitts (Quinto) and his TV chimp Spanky, who spent three days with serial killer Larry Lee Ranes (Elordi) in 1964. While some press reports have described the film as a queer project, Quinto says we won't be seeing him and Elordi steam up the screen: "I wouldn't say it's an overtly queer story, but I will say that there are undertones of both emotional and physical tension between these two characters."

The actors became close during filming. "We talked a lot about his desire to do theater," Quinto recalls. "I was like, 'Go do a play in London. Go do a play in New York. That's where you really cut your teeth.' I'm sure we'll see him onstage at some point."

Before the Tribeca Film Festival premiere of the movie, Quinto is making the rounds promoting "Historical Homos," an upcoming docuseries about LGBTQ history that he produced. Historian **Bash** and film producer and actor **Donal Brophy** host the program. "I do think it's an incredibly important moment to proudly tell stories about our heritage and our past," Quinto says. "We are in this moment of real backlash against the progress that we've made as a community. But also look at how much we've accomplished." "Historical Homos" debuts June 9 on streaming platform Dekkoo.

(1)

(2)

(3)

(4)

(5)

Córdova: Frazer Harrison/GA/Getty Images; Carey: Gotham/GC Images; Brooks: Amanda Edwards/Getty Images; Elordi: Dimitrios Kambouris/Getty Images; Quinto: Dave Benett/Getty Images

EXPOSURE

Edited by Marc Malkin

Uma Thurman and Levon Roan Thurman-Hawke at the "Jeanne du Barry" premiere

Jeremy O. Harris and Hari Nef at the Vanity Fair x Prada Party

Leonardo DiCaprio and Lily Gladstone at the "Killers of the Flower Moon" premiere

Natalie Portman, Charles Melton and Julianne Moore at the "May December" photo call

Zahra Amir Ebrahimi, Cate Blanchett, the Golden Globes' Helen Hoehne and *Variety*'s Ramin Setoodeh at the *Variety* and Golden Globes Breakthrough Awards party

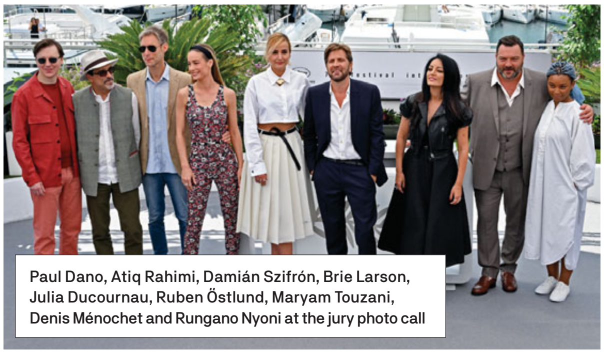
May 16-20

Cannes Film Festival

Cannes, France

The 76th annual festivities opened with a screening of "Jeanne du Barry," starring **Johnny Depp** as King Louis XV. The star power continued with **Harrison Ford** walking the Palais red carpet for the premiere of "Indiana Jones and the Dial of Destiny," the **James Mangold** action adventure that also marks Ford's final bow in the decades-old franchise. **Martin Scorsese**'s epic "Killers of the Flower Moon" received a nine-minute standing ovation at its premiere. During the film's press conference, star **Robert De Niro** took a shot at former President **Donald Trump**, describing him as "evil" but refusing to say the 2024 presidential hopeful's name: "There are people who still think he can do a good job. Imagine how insane that is."

Calista Flockhart and Harrison Ford at the "Indiana Jones and the Dial of Destiny" premiere



Paul Dano, Atiq Rahimi, Damián Szifrón, Brie Larson, Julia Ducournau, Ruben Östlund, Maryam Touzani, Denis Ménochet and Rungano Nyoni at the jury photo call

Jennifer Lawrence and Justine Ciarrocchi at the "Bread and Roses" photo call

Ginevra Elkann, Amazon's Jeff Bezos and Lauren Sánchez at the Vanity Fair x Prada Party

Salma Hayek and François-Henri Pinault at the Kering Women in Motion Dinner

U Thurman/L Thurman, DiCaprio/Gladstone, Hayek/Pinault, Dano/Rahimi/Szifrón/Larson/Ducournau/Ostlund/Touzani/Ménochet/Nyoni: Michael Buckner for Variety (4);
Lawrence/Ciarrocchi: Andreas Rentz/Getty Images; Vanity Fair x Prada: Victor Boyko/Getty Images (3); Flockhart/Ford: Marc Piasecki/FilmMagic; Portman/Melton/Moore: Lionel Hahn/Getty Images;

EXPOSURE

Sydney Sweeney

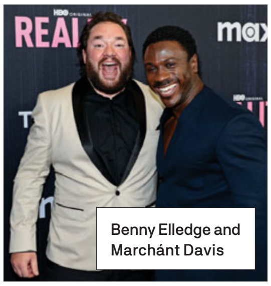
May 16

'Reality' Premiere

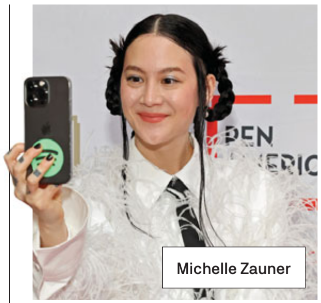
Museum of Modern Art, New York

"Euphoria" actor **Sydney Sweeney** stars in the HBO Films drama as **Reality Winner**, the real-life NSA whistleblower who leaked information to the press about Russia's role in the 2016 presidential election. "I was drawn by how complex she was," Sweeney told *Variety*. "There are so many contradicting layers of who she is, what it means to be a woman. I feel that we were able to take a moment and truly humanize it and not put any type of lens on it. It was just a real moment in time." She continued, "I hope that people see Reality as a human being and that they stop letting articles and tabloids label people and put thoughts into their minds."

John Way



Benny Elledge and Marchánt Davis



Michelle Zauner

Salman Rushdie

Colin Jost, Lorne Michaels and John Mulaney

May 18

PEN America Literary Gala

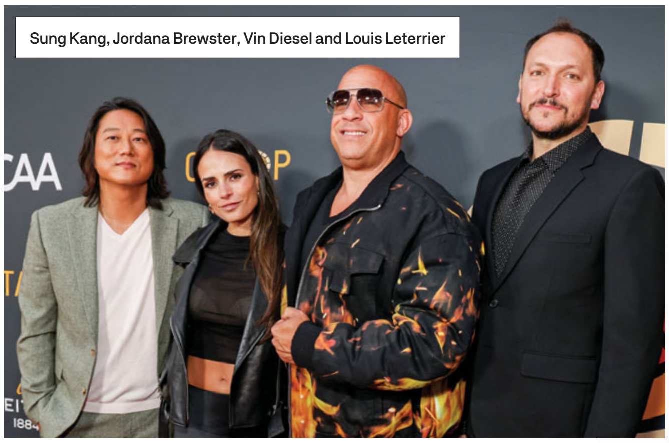
American Museum of Natural History, New York

The event marked honoree **Salman Rushdie**'s first public appearance since he was brutally attacked during a lecture in August. The writer dedicated his award to those who rushed to his aid after the stabbing. "If it had not been for these people, I most certainly would not be standing here today," Rushdie said. "I was the target that day, but they were the heroes. The courage, that day, was all theirs. I owe my life to them." Standing under the museum's iconic model of a blue whale suspended from the ceiling, host **Colin Jost** said, "I feel very fortunate to be here in this room tonight surrounded by two things that might not be around much longer: writers and ocean life. This is the first time that whale has been the least endangered thing in the room."

Salina EsTitties and Luxx Noir London

Michelle Rodriguez and DJ Bateeza

Alan Ritchson



Sung Kang, Jordana Brewster, Vin Diesel and Louis Leterrier

Paris Jackson

May 20

Charlize Theron Africa Outreach Project Block Party

Universal Studios Backlot, Universal City

Charlize Theron had to bail out of the annual benefit for her Africa nonprofit after testing positive for COVID just hours earlier, but her friends — including her "Fast X" co-stars — showed up nonetheless. "We're having a good weekend. We're here for a good cause," **Vin Diesel** told *Variety*. "Ya gotta come out for Charlize. … This isn't the first year. She's been going it awhile, and it's a beautiful thing." Diesel also teased that he's still hoping for a female-led "Fast" installment: "I started developing a female-fronted spinoff in 2017 along with other spinoffs. And the sooner I deliver the finale, the sooner I can launch all the spinoffs."

Sweeney: Taylor Hill/WireImage; Reality: Dimitrios Kambouris/Getty Images; Zauner: Cindy Ord/Getty Images; Rushdie: Bryan Bedder/Getty Images; Jost/Michaels/Mulaney: Jamie McCarthy/Getty Images; Charlize Theron Party: Mark Von Holden for Variety (5)

SO MUCH CONTENT, HOW DO YOU DECIDE?

VARIETY

What to Watch

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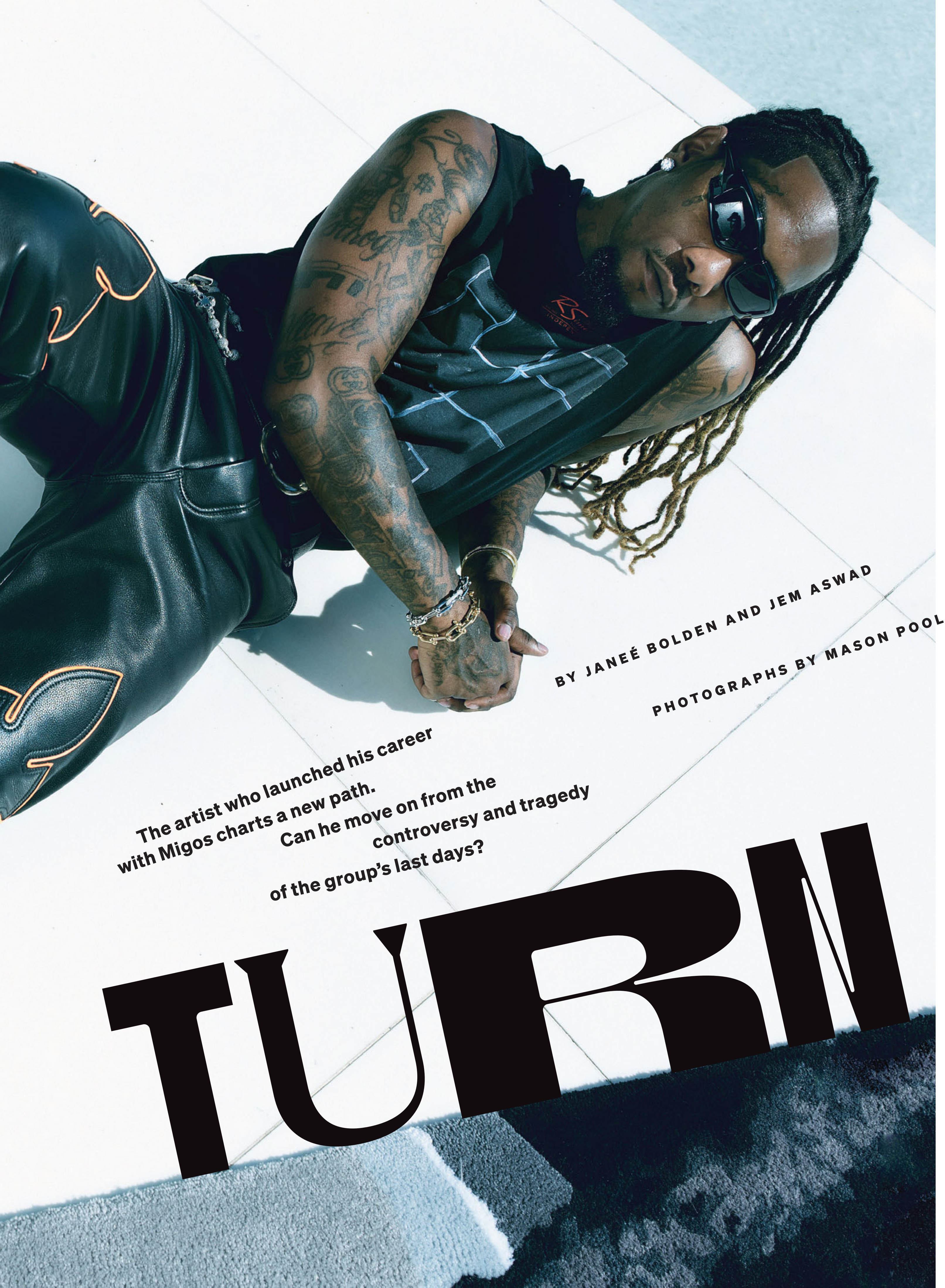
VARIETY.COM/WHATTOWATCH

OFFSET'S



TURN

The artist who launched his career with Migos charts a new path. Can he move on from the controversy and tragedy of the group's last days?

BY JANEÉ BOLDEN AND JEM ASWAD

PHOTOGRAPHS BY MASON POOLE

ON EASTER SUNDAY

evening, in a palatial house on a ridge high in the hills above Hollywood, Offset puffs on a joint as songs from his forthcoming album blast from a portable speaker. He's been working on this album for many months — since Migos, the pioneering Atlanta hip-hop trio with which he rocketed to stardom in the mid-2010s, drifted into an unofficial hiatus a couple of years ago, and well before the shocking, tragic murder of his bandmate Takeoff outside a Houston bowling alley on Nov. 1.

Several members of Offset's team mill around the sparsely furnished house — one of three residences for the rapper and his wife, Cardi B — while the man himself, casually clad all in black, bobs in his seat, his wildcat eyes sparkling.

The room is filled with racks of designer drip as Offset's team prepares looks for a photo shoot and his upcoming performance at the Rolling Loud Thailand festival, six days and more than 8,000 miles away. Three long racks bulge with jackets, shirts, pants, vests, coats. Dozens of shoes, ranging from stylish formal to clompy, Kanye-esque boots and eye-popping sneakers are lined up on the floor. A nearby table sparkles with seven figures' worth of jewelry — rings with colorful gemstones, diamond-encrusted chains, even pearls from Tiffany's. "This is nothing," Offset tells me and my writing partner dismissively. "You should see downstairs."

I

VARIETY
05.24.23

Seated on a couch, he cues up his new songs, which feature Travis Scott, fellow Atlanta rapper Future, Chloe Bailey, Latto and, on one he didn't play, Cardi. "I got three women on my project," he says. "The third being Cardi?" we ask. He nods with a grin.

Apart from a track that may be called "Too Upset," which Offset teased online, the rapper asks not to have any titles revealed, but the songs range between street and sultry, party and menace — and they're all fire. One is a rebellious anthem; another, a softer song he calls a "female record"; and the one with Scott has a sinister, cinematic sound befitting a Marvel villain. Offset laughs at the description. "Villain music," he says. "I like that."

After his up-tempo collab with Future concludes, he suddenly says, "You wanna hear my last song with Takeoff?"

As the song erupts from the speaker, he beams, laughs, raps and gestures along with the lyrics. He says the pair recorded it last summer; some assembled members of his team are hearing it for the first time.

"You gotta see this!" he shouts, lifting up his hoodie to display a giant tattoo of Takeoff's face sprawled across his entire back.

"It's my favorite picture of him," he notes. "I like it because he had his glasses off."

The ink is fresh, less than 24 hours old. He spent seven hours getting it done and plans for another three sometime before he has to board the 19-hour flight to Thailand for the festival, where Cardi is also performing.

When he's done previewing songs, the conversation turns to his children, and to fashion and to the music he's listening to — Young Nudy, Don Toliver and frequent collaborator Metro Boomin. Kendrick Lamar's latest, "Mr. Morale & the Big Steppers," gets high marks. "He's talking about some real-life shit n----- go through," he says.

It's already been established that he can't discuss Migos, owing to an ongoing legal standoff with the group's label, Quality Control, over ownership of his solo recordings, but he expounds on what he hopes his next era can look like. "This is me going full-fledged into my solo career," he says. "The objective is to do it fully and smash shit and fuck the game up as a solo artist. It's all set, my next chapter. It's my time."

Indeed, sources say the album is "the most anticipated record in the Universal Music Group" — the giant parent company of the label releasing it.

But when the conversation turns to Takeoff — despite all the elation Offset showed while the song played, despite all the emotion that went into a full tattoo on his back — he shuts down when asked to put his feelings into words. "It's hard for me to talk about shit right now," he says. "I've never talked about this stuff. Seriously. Talking about Take is hard, man," he says, almost whispering. "Talking about *all* this shit is hard. That's why I don't, to be honest. That shit hurts. Like, it's gonna put me in a mood, and I don't want to get in that mood. Some things I don't never tell nobody. He's not here. That shit feels fake, bro," he says, shaking his head at the unreality of the situation. "I get through my day thinking it's fake. And I don't say nothing to nobody about it."

Visibly upset, he says, "I think I need to take a break" and heads into the other room, returning only to say goodnight.

Cardi B and Offset at the 2023 Vanity Fair Oscar Party

However one contends with grief is a deeply personal matter. But Offset doesn't mention that he and the Migos extended family were not in the easiest place at the time of Takeoff's murder.

Hailing from the Gwinnett County suburbs north of Atlanta, Offset — born Kiari Kendrell Cephus on Dec. 14, 1991 — says his name came to his mother in a dream. To her and his late grandmother, he was the family's "golden child," but his relationship with his father was nonexistent.

"My daddy wasn't even present, wasn't nowhere to be found," Offset says before adding, "But I never hated the n----." His life since then has been filled with strong women: his mother, his grandmother and a large percentage of his creative team and collaborators. "I just feel like the aesthetics of a female is different from a male," he explains. "A female can take you somewhere you might can't take yourself. You always need that guidance, like from that mother or that grandmother. That's my key to my push and my drive. Strong women are going to put you in strong places."

He was classmates with Quavo — the third member of Migos — and began hanging out with him and Takeoff when Offset was in the sixth grade. While Quavo was Takeoff's uncle, the two were just three years apart in age, and although Offset is often referred to as Quavo's cousin, they are actually not biologically related.

As a child, Offset showed a precocious talent as a dancer that landed him in videos for Whitney Houston and TLC. "I started off as a child doing this shit on accident," he says and laughs. "My mama pulled up like, 'Hey, when the music plays, dance!' I'm like 8 years old and I get picked to be in a Whitney video. That's big. So that be a reminder: I always think of my past to remind myself, 'This shit is gonna be fine.' That's how I stay in

> **"This is me going full-fledged into my solo career. The objective is to do it fully and smash shit and fuck the game up. It's my time."**

(Opening spread) Fashion Direction: SheShe Pendleton; Production: Derrian "Phreshy" Perry; Wardrobe Assistants: Noah Joseph, Monty Archie and Aliana Canales; Grooming: Ebony "Lady lockz" Wright and Youssef Eltoweissy; Pants and belt: Chrome Hearts; shirt: RAF Simons from H.Lorenzo; Boots: Celine; Glasses: Rick Owens; Belt Chain: Eliantte jewelry; (Previous spread) Suit: Gucci, Bracelets: Tiffany & Co.; Rings: Bottega Veneta
(This page) Axelle/Bauer-Griffin/FilmMagic/Getty Images

pocket. That's how I know I'm going to be great."

The hangouts in Quavo's mom's basement eventually led to the "triplet flow" rapping style the three developed. Instead of the traditional hip-hop group format of trading verses, Migos basically traded syllables, punctuating each other's verses and flows with shouted interjections, ad-libs, onomatopoeia or just noises. Raised on Lil Wayne, Tupac and local heroes like OutKast and T.I. — and with a key early cosign from Gucci Mane — the group dropped its first mixtape in 2011 and went nationwide the following year with the song "Bando," which became a viral hit in 2012.

While still teenagers, Migos signed with Quality Control, a new, family-like, local label/management company founded and run with a firm hand by former Jeezy/Gucci Mane manager Kevin "Coach K" Lee and Pierre "P" Thomas. (The company, which has also seen major success with Lil Yachty, Lil Baby and City Girls, was acquired earlier this year by the U.S. division of HYBE, BTS' management company, for some $320 million.) Boosted by a crucial endorsement from Drake — who rapped some verses from the unknown group's mixtape to Coach K just days after it dropped — Migos advanced that early success with their ubiquitous official debut single, "Versace." Drake jumped on a remix, and the song was certified gold.

But the group faced challenges trying to take things to the next level — not least because Offset, who'd fathered his first child at 17 and embraced a street lifestyle that he admits wasn't part of his upbringing, was in Georgia's DeKalb County Jail for violating his probation after a prior conviction for felony burglary and theft. He's absent from the video for "Bando," except for the T-shirts bearing the words "Free Offset" worn by his fellow Migos and multiple others.

"When I had my son, I was in the streets," he says now. "I was doing whatever I had to do to get me some money."

Even after his release later in 2013, his ability to travel was limited by his parole terms. The group released a stream of mixtapes of wildly varying quality and scored a handful of hit singles — "Fight Night," "Handsome and Wealthy" and "Look at My Dab," the last of which played no small role in advancing the dance craze. But Migos just couldn't seem to catch fire.

Trouble struck again in April 2015 when police stopped the group from finishing a concert at Georgia Southern University and arrested all three members. Charged with four counts of drug and weapons possession, Offset was denied bond. A fight in jail less than a month later extended his sentence, and he'd ultimately spend eight months behind bars that year before accepting an Alford plea deal. While Offset was locked up, the group continued to perform. But he rejoined in time to take part in Migos' cameo on Donald Glover's FX series "Atlanta," and wrote the demo for the song that would vault the group to superstardom.

With "Bad and Boujee," it all finally came together. The song became the group's biggest hit to date, topping the Billboard Hot 100 and being certified gold or platinum in 10 countries. Glover even shouted out the group when accepting a Golden Globe Award for "Atlanta." "I really wanna thank the Migos," he said. "Not for being in the show, but for making 'Bad and Boujee.' Like, that's the best song ever." It was followed by the group's most focused and cohesive full-length, "Culture," which topped the Billboard 200 albums chart in 2017 and remained on it for 108 weeks.

But Migos were more than just a group with a hit — they were a movement, a moment, spawning countless memes, parodies and even a hilarious 2018 "Saturday Night Live" skit, featuring Glover and A$AP Rocky, revolving around a group-therapy session with a sparring Migos-like trio called "Friendos."

Migos' Takeoff,
Quavo and Offset
at the Belasco
in Los Angeles,
November 2021

However, the group's sprawling and overstuffed follow-up, "Culture II," fell prey to the trend of cramming as many songs onto an album as possible to boost streaming numbers. The weaker tracks caused the album to suffer creatively, although not commercially: It also topped the Billboard chart and stayed there for 110 weeks, spawning the singles "Stir Fry," "Walk It and Talk It" (featuring Drake) and, of course, "MotorSport," which highlighted a then-new rapper from New York named Belcalis Almánzar — Cardi B.

Offset and Cardi's whirlwind romance began with a first date at the 2017 Super Bowl. They secretly married that September and had their first child together, daughter Kulture, in July 2018 (a fact that Cardi revealed during a musical performance on "SNL"). The marriage has been

(This page) Michael Kovac/Getty Images for Activision. (Next Spread) Full look: Balenciaga

“Talking about Take is hard, man. Talking about all this shit is hard. That’s why I don’t. That shit hurts. ... Some things I don’t never tell nobody.”

BALENCIAGA

a dramatic one. There have been reports of infidelity, along with two filings for divorce (by Cardi) followed by reconciliations and another child, son Wave, born in September 2021. But through it all, the two have shown a dedication to each other and their family, with Offset saying that Cardi treats his three other children — Jordan, 13; Kalea, 8; and Kody, 8 — as her own. It also helped him kick his codeine habit.

"I put down lean," he says. "I was drinking my whole career. It opened my mind up, but I never thought it helped me create. I feel like getting past that, cleaning up and putting that message out."

As for Cardi, he shouts, "My bestie!" before rattling off Cardi's qualities. "She always got my back, right or wrong. We both are on the same mission to make each other better. Social is her strong point, so I listen to her social advice. And me, it's the music, but I play behind the scenes; it's my wife so I want to make sure she win.

"We are a great team," he continues. "We're a powerhouse at this point — icon status. We believe in God. We believe in family. We're always going to keep winning."

Cardi seconds his emotions. "What I appreciate about my husband," she says, "is that no matter what issue I am having personally or professionally, I know he will take care of me and our family. It's handled. I know that I have a man who has my back for real. I fully support him in this next chapter of his music career."

However, Offset's other family — Migos — was beginning to pull apart as its fame grew in the wake of the multiplatinum success of "Culture." The cracks broke into the open in 2020 when the group filed a legal complaint against its longtime attorney, Damien Granderson, claiming he had cheated the trio "out of millions of dollars," accusing him of "glaring conflicts of interest" and favoring Quality Control, which he also represented. (The lawsuit was dismissed with prejudice the following year.) The ensuing drama, combined with the pandemic, held up the release of "Culture III" for nearly a year and a half. On the album's cover, the three members' faces are fused together in a photoshopped show of unity. But breakup rumors persisted, and accelerated last May when Offset and Cardi unfollowed the other group members on social media after Quavo and Takeoff announced a duo project that didn't include him.

Then, in August, Offset filed his lawsuit against Quality Control in a dispute over ownership of his solo music, the rights for which he claims he "paid handsomely" (sources say $3 million) in a January 2021 settlement, according to the complaint. In response, QC called the accusations in the lawsuit "false" and "totally detached from reality," insisting that "Offset remains a part of QC."

The lawsuit intensified the group's internal rift: A concert in Houston last summer billed as Migos ended up being just Quavo and Takeoff, and the pair's "Only Built for Infinity Links" album was released on Oct. 7. In an early October interview on Revolt TV, Quavo said, "We stand on real-deal, real-deal loyalty, and sometimes that shit ain't displayed. This got something to do with the three brothers. It is what it is. Right now, we gonna be the duo till time tell." (Quavo and Offset declined to comment further on the matter.)

In September 2022, Offset posted on Twitter that he had an album coming on Nov. 11. But then Takeoff was murdered outside a Houston bowling alley on Nov. 1, during an argument related to a dice game that he wasn't even playing (although Quavo was). Takeoff, just 28, was described as an "innocent bystander" by local police.

Offset and Quavo both posted heartfelt tributes to Takeoff. Cardi told the entertainment website The Neighborhood Talk she had been "feeling so hopeless trying to make my husband … crack a smile … seeing him randomly cry."

But at the Grammy Awards in February, Quavo performed a tribute to Takeoff alone. Reports, and an alleged recording, surfaced of an argument between him and Offset backstage before the performance, with a woman who sounds like Cardi yelling repeatedly, "Both of y'all is wrong!" (Both parties declined comment on the Grammy-night incident, although Offset dismissed it on Twitter.) In February, Quavo seemed to close the door on Migos for good in his Takeoff tribute song "Greatness": "Don't ask about the group / He gone, we gone / It can't come back."

After a brief mourning period, Offset's posts became more positive, signaling that he's ready to move forward. And although details are still being solidified, his album is slated for release via Universal's Capitol Music Group this summer with a tour to follow. Quavo has been dropping new music, and sources say he also has an album due in the coming weeks.

"Offset has made a phenomenal album; we can't wait until the world hears his masterpiece," a Capitol spokesperson tells *Variety*. "We're deep into release planning now and will soon have big news to share!"

As we're leaving the photo shoot the day after our abruptly terminated interview, Offset gives us both hugs and handshakes. "No hard feelings about last night," he says. "I got emotional."

After all, no matter how complex the relationship gets, the family ties run deep with these people he's known since he was a kid. But he's essentially left that family for his literal one. He's almost a caricature of a proud father as he talks about his kids' good grades, and how Jordan was just 12 when he taught himself how to use the music software program Fruity Loops but didn't tell his dad until he was "good enough to make something hard." Kody makes straight A's and appeared in an Ivy Park campaign alongside his dad. Kulture is into fashion and adores her big sis, Kalea. And Wave started dancing before he could walk — "He was just sitting there, dancing!" Offset laughs, acknowledging there's a good chance that at least one of them may follow in his footsteps. "It's in their bloodline."

But for now, there's an album to finish, shows to play and a vision to realize.

"Sometimes you gotta sit back and not rush," he says, scrolling through dozens of unreleased songs on his phone. "I really wanted to drop the album like two years ago, but it wasn't time. I had to master who I was, and I got it now." ●

> **"A female can take you somewhere you might can't take yourself. Strong women are going to put you in strong places."**

GETTiNG

For years, Lizzy Caplan was happy to fly under the radar. Now, with leading roles in ‘Fleishman Is in Trouble,’ ‘Fatal Attraction,’ and the upcoming Netflix series with Robert De Niro, she’s having to learn how to be a star

Story
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LIZZY CAPLAN ISN'T INTERESTED IN FAME. ACTUALLY, SHE'S A LITTLE TURNED OFF BY IT.

Lizzy Caplan in "Fatal Attraction"

"I don't know how people do that and don't go completely insane," she says. "The pressure is wild — pressure to look a certain way, or that every single thing you're saying is being dissected. I just want to pretend to be other people for a living."

That's not to say that the actress, whose career began in 1999 with a role on "Freaks and Geeks," hasn't enjoyed critical and commercial success — she earned an Emmy nomination for "Masters of Sex" in 2014, and still gets recognized daily as Janis Ian, her grungy outsider from 2004's "Mean Girls."

When we meet over oat milk lattes and Earl Grey tea in West Hollywood, Caplan is effortlessly cool in a slouchy sweatshirt, boyfriend jeans and her hair in a neat bun, the outfit elevated by several pieces of dainty gold jewelry.

Despite her aversion to notoriety, she's found herself in somewhat of a career renaissance, with two major TV projects in the past year. In FX's "Fleishman Is in Trouble," she plays Libby, an ex-Manhattanite struggling to come to terms with her new identity as a suburban stay-at-home mom, and in Paramount+'s "Fatal Attraction," she takes on the iconic role of femme fatale Alex Forrest, originated by Glenn Close in the 1987 film of the same name.

The characters couldn't be more different, but that's nothing new for Caplan, who has avoided being typecast. When I say, "Looking at your range of roles, I'm struck by ..." Caplan cuts me off, saying, "... how many movies you've never heard of?" We share a laugh, and she's not wrong.

"It seems rare to know, for me, what a whole year is going to look like," she says. "I keep it moving, jumping from lily pad to lily pad." She adds, "I feel extremely lucky that I get to bounce around so much and do the things that I personally find meaningful or scary or a challenge."

With Alex Forrest, Caplan ticked all three of those boxes, but she required a bit of convincing at first. "I had my own fears about it, outside of the pressure of stepping into Glenn Close's shoes," she says. While Close earned an Oscar nomination for her performance, she's since been vocal about the film's lack of tact in its portrayal of mental illness. So righting that wrong was of paramount importance to Caplan and showrunner Alexandra Cunningham.

"Every conversation I had with Alex, I just got more invested," Caplan says. "Knowing about Glenn Close's concerns, that was the wind behind our sails. We're telling a different version of the story, maybe more in line with the work that she did."

Caplan extensively researched the role with a psychiatrist to understand where Alex was coming from but didn't get too hung up on diagnosing the character. "I don't feel like we were trying to show a very specific mental illness," she says. "It's 'Fatal Attraction,' not 'Frances' — hopefully it's entertaining."

Of course, the series is far more than a portrait of Alex's struggles with her mental health: It's an erotic thriller. Caplan shared the steamy scenes with Joshua Jackson, who took on Michael Douglas' role as Dan Gallagher. "We did our first table read over Zoom, and somebody told us how much chemistry we had — over Zoom," Caplan says, rolling her eyes. "I was like, 'That's not possible. I call your bluff.'"

Despite their video-call chemistry, the actors had help with the intimate moments — this was Caplan's first time working with an intimacy coordinator, which made things "very different" on set. "On 'Masters of Sex,' I always felt comfortable speaking my mind about things I was comfortable or uncomfortable about, and I never felt pressured into doing anything," she recalls. However, Caplan says, there were many day players who'd come on set to do "wild, naked" sex scenes, who could have used an advocate like an intimacy coordinator.

"I like to think that we created a really safe environment to feel like they could raise their hand if something made them feel odd. That's definitely how I remember it," she says. "But there was nobody to throw a look to in the corner, who'd step in. When that great train of production is moving, it's really easy to feel like you can't slow it down. So the intimacy coordinator is for the

With Jesse Eisenberg, Claire Danes and Adam Brody in "Fleishman Is in Trouble"

people who have no power and no voice. And for that reason, I will never complain about it. I completely see the validity of that role. It's shocking that it didn't exist before."

"Fleishman Is in Trouble" reunited Caplan with Jesse Eisenberg, with whom she starred in 2016's "Now You See Me 2." They hit it off fast. "Making 'Now You See Me' really was one of the most fun experiences ever," Caplan says. "Jesse was on my second date with my now-husband. Jesse's basically my brother … because you go on a second date with your future husband with your brother, of course," she adds with a cheeky smile.

"Yes," Eisenberg says over email later, "I went on the date eager to pass judgment and veto Tom." (Caplan is married to British actor Tom Riley, with whom she has a 1-year-old son.) "But Tom was so cool and funny, I think we both fell in love that night — her slightly more than me."

When Eisenberg heard he and Caplan would be working together again on "Fleishman" — they'd be playing college best friends so honest with each other that the relationship becomes almost unbearable — he instantly understood the tone of the show, which had been murky up to that point. "When I heard Lizzy's name, the show suddenly gelled in my mind: the wryness, the emotion, the insight. It all felt right." He adds, "I've never had a relationship, either in my life or as an actor, where I am annoyed by a friendship with a woman. In the show, I become increasingly cruel to Lizzy as she becomes increasingly invasive in my life. But it was great to play these feelings toward Lizzy, because she's so sharp and has such a strong presence that it felt like a fair fight."

Caplan's hot streak doesn't seem to be letting up anytime soon. Just after our meeting, she's headed to New York to begin work on "Zero Day," Netflix's conspiracy thriller starring Robert De Niro in his first regular television role.

I bring up the news that De Niro has just welcomed his seventh child at age 79, and Caplan doesn't miss a beat: "It's me!" she says, joking, because she plays his daughter in the series.

She'll get to meet him for the first time tomorrow, and excitement flashes across her face as she shares how she hopes that meeting goes. "I'm gonna let him lead. I'm in awe of him. It's always interesting to meet somebody who looms so large in your brain and your childhood and your understanding of culture. Yet he'll be a human person — I assume."

While plot details are still under wraps, Caplan will play a congresswoman seeking to escape her father's political shadow. She'll be joined by Connie Britton, Jesse Plemons and Joan Allen in principal roles. "All the scripts are written," Caplan says. "The cast is stacked. Everybody has great moments in it. It's an exciting political thriller, but also definitely a showcase for all of these actors. I'm pinching myself that I get to do this. It's wild."

Caplan has put in more than 20 years of work to reach this moment, but she discusses her success with humility. "I think when you're starting out, it's easy to look at a career that spanned many years and say, 'Oh, that was by design.' But it wasn't. For me, it was a combination of exercising choices that I probably shouldn't have made, combined with dumb luck."

She finishes her tea and smiles. "This feels like the culmination of this bonkers couple years," she says. "I can only hope for more bonkers years. Keep it moving!" ●

"THE INTIMACY COORDINATOR IS FOR THE PEOPLE WHO HAVE NO POWER AND NO VOICE. IT'S SHOCKING THAT IT DIDN'T EXIST BEFORE."

(Previous page) Paramount+; (This page) FX

WANDA VISION

In her latest Netflix special,
Wanda Sykes finds
laugh-out-loud things to say about
white supremacy, Black Lives Matter
and trans rights

Story by
ADAM B. VARY

Photographs by
SHAYAN ASGHARNIA

"I knew I wanted to talk about it, but I just didn't know how to make it funny."

Though Wanda Sykes began working on "I'm an Entertainer," her latest Netflix stand-up special, in 2019, hardly any of the material she wrote prior to March 2020 made it into the show. Instead, it was the radioactive events of the pandemic era — from COVID vaccinations to the Jan. 6 insurrection, the battle over trans rights to the murders of Black Americans like George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery and Elijah McClain — that Sykes was drawn to.

Those deaths and the racial reckoning that followed were not obvious fodder for making people laugh. So the 59-year-old comedian began with herself, digging deep into her personal life for what's funny about racial dynamics. She starts with her marriage to Alex Sykes, a Frenchwoman whose clueless white privilege Sykes tweaks with equal parts affection and exasperation.

As Sykes relays in the special, at one point in 2020, Alex sneaked into a construction site next door to their home outside Philadelphia to check out the sightlines into the couple's bedroom, an unsettling parallel to Arbery doing something similar right before he was killed. When Sykes saw Alex waving at her from the house under construction — an objectively funny image — she realized she had her way in. "I was like, 'Oh, wow, here it is,'" Sykes says. "Things just kept falling into place that way."

In the special, when you imitate your wife in a faux French accent, you always have a pretend cigarette in your hand. In real life, is she actually always smoking?

No, that's the thing. When I first started doing her onstage, I would say at the end, "Oh, by the way, my wife doesn't even smoke. This is just how I see her." I didn't say that in the special, so she's like [in a French accent, pretending to hold a cigarette], "Everybody thinks I smoke now! Everybody's asking me, 'Alex, when did you start smoking?'" When I talk like her, I just happen to do it.

Is it that she's French?

Yeah. They all smoke.

How aware is Alex of what you'll be saying about her onstage?

Alex, she'll come out to a show as I'm working on it, and she'll comment [cigarette in hand], "Ooo, I like that you talk about me."

You do have a fair amount of fun . . . I wouldn't say necessarily "at her expense."

No, it's totally at her expense.

A good example of you turning a topic that's become so fraught in stand-up into deeply funny material is the run of jokes you make about the laws banning trans women from women's bathrooms. How did you get there?

I'm not trans, but I wanted to find something where I can shine some light on what they're going through, to show how just stupid and hateful really it is. I was in a woman's bathroom one time, and I was like, 'Who would want to come in here anyway? I want to go check out the men's room — sometimes, it's even cleaner.' And that's how that whole bit started.

Do you feel that comedy about this topic perhaps balances out what Dave Chappelle has been saying about trans people in his specials?

Um, I don't know about balancing it out, because I think what he said was so hurtful and damaging to the trans community. So yeah, the scale is still tipped, I will say, in their favor. But I know I wanted to say something, because so much has been said on that platform. I definitely want to add something on the other side of it.

Do you know Dave?

Mmm-hmm. We started doing stand-up together in D.C. Yeah, we go way back.

Have you talked to him since all of that?

No. I mean, it's not intentional — you know, I still love the guy. But I haven't had a chance to talk to him. If our paths did cross, I totally would say something.

There has been a backlash among some comedians about so-called woke comedy. How has it been for you to watch that unfold?

It's pretty funny. If you want to give me the label of a "woke comic," that's fine. That's great. What makes me laugh is that they say that like it's an insult: "Oh, they're woke." *Thank you!* It's not an insult at all. I mean, George Carlin, he was woke. Richard Pryor, woke. Bill Hicks, woke. It's almost like they're angry that we're evolving.

It feels like in several areas — women's rights, LGBTQ rights — the country has been backsliding over the past few years. But it sounds like in comedy, you feel there's been some progress?

I do. But the steps back in both the news and comedy, that's what makes the most noise, instead of the progress we're making. I think they're just louder, the Trump supporters and all that. But I like to focus on the wins. I mean, there are not a lot of them, but I like to celebrate them!

You get more personal than you have before when you talk about you and your wife's conversations about race.

Especially during the pandemic, we had some rough moments. She's trying to understand what's going on, but she doesn't know a lot of the history behind it in this country. It was just very frustrating for me, trying to talk about it. And then it was hard for her, because she did start to see it and she was like, "Oh, my God, I didn't even realize that I do these things." I can hear her talking to her friends — you know, her little Frenchy friends — about privilege. It's just so funny, because I hear her friends, like, "Of course, Alex, what did you think?!"

When you begin talking in the special about the murder of Elijah McClain ...

That broke my heart. I lost it a couple times doing that onstage.

So how are you managing the tone between capturing that deep feeling and wanting to be an entertainer?

I guess just being respectful and being honest. That's why I work it out in a comedy club. Once I find the funny, it gets to the theater.

Were there any jokes or runs you tried out that you realized weren't going to work out or connect with the audience?

In the trans area, I had to step some things back that might be misconstrued as me making fun, instead of trying to help. It was more about the laws making it a crime for parents to help their children who were having gender-identity issues. I said to myself, "You don't know what the fuck you're talking about — shut up and let's just talk about the bathrooms."

And the audience, they did laugh. But then I was like, "Wait a minute. Why are y'all laughing? What are you laughing about?" So yeah, I'm quick to get rid of something if it doesn't feel right.

Styling: Sammy K/The Only Agency; Grooming: Lisa Deveaux; (Previous spread) Suit: Sergio Hudson; Top: Ralph Lauren; Jewelry: Le Vian; (Opposite page) Suit: Tom Ford; Top: Ralph Lauren; Shoes: Roger Vivier; Jewelry: Le Vian

Some comedians have been clear that getting a laugh is their North Star …
Yeah, actually, when I was talking about menopause, I used to do a joke about "Can you imagine a slave having a hot flash?" Very funny bit. And one of my good friends, she's not a comedian, but she's like, "You know, at the end of the day, we're laughing at slavery. You've got white people in here laughing at this Black woman." I said, "I got it." Never did it again.
Do you think Trump will be nominated again?
I don't see how. I mean, are we *that* bad? Is the country *that* horrible? *Really*?
He is polling higher than any other GOP candidate.
Well, I mean, they're all awful.
Would he win again?
No. Biden will beat him again. Yep! I said it: Old Man Biden will beat him again!
Finally, though you hosted the 2022 Oscars with Amy Schumer and Regina Hall, you don't talk at all about Will Smith slapping Chris Rock in your special. Is there a particular reason why?
Didn't really have any jokes for it. And I figured it was Chris' face. ●

> "And one of my friends, she's like, 'You've got white people in here laughing at this Black woman.' I said, 'I got it.'"

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Liam Daniel/Netflix

Don't Sleep on These Series

***Variety*'s TV critic highlights the likely and unlikely hits of the season to binge before voting** • *By Alison Herman*

All awards shows are arbitrary, and none more so than the Emmys, for which voters must select a handful of nominees and winners from an ocean of worthwhile television. The shows on this list, arranged alphabetically, represent just a small sampling of the series that deserve recognition from the TV Academy, and while some are more likely to receive an official nod than others, all are worth viewers' precious time.

Abbott Elementary

In its first season, "Abbott" became the increasingly rare broadcast sitcom to resonate with both audiences and critics. In its second, Quinta Brunson's ABC comedy doubled down on classic tropes like the will-they-won't-they. But it also told a story unprecedented in network primetime, mounting a damning case against charter schools and the threats they pose to urban public schools like Philadelphia's fictional Abbott, including its students. Even more remarkably, it never feels pedantic. It's just making the most of its setting — and the massive audience it's found against the odds.

Andor

It's doubtful anyone walked out of the theater after seeing "Rogue One" and wanted to know more about rebel fighter Cassian Andor. But "Andor" creator Tony Gilroy uses that fact to his advantage. The Disney+ drama is all about the obscure toilers and mid-level functionaries who make both sides of a revolution work: the freedom-fighting insurgents and the vast imperial state they're trying to dismantle. As the rest of "Star Wars" runs on fumes, revisiting the same stories and characters ad nauseam, "Andor" finds a new, insightful way into the sprawling space epic.

→ Ali Wong (here with Ashley Park) impresses in Netflix's "Beef."

Barry

Bill Hader has rebranded from an "SNL" star to an up-and-coming auteur. The bridge between the two is "Barry," the HBO half-hour that itself has transformed over four seasons from a dark comedy about a hitman who tries acting to a soul-corroding drama about the damage of self-delusion. Hader directed all eight episodes of the final season, making Los Angeles — and later, Kansas — feel as empty and haunted as the souls of its characters. It was daring when Season 3 went out with Barry brought to justice; it's downright thrilling for the show to close out with a time jump, taking risks and redefining itself 'till the very end.

← Diego Luna returns as Cassian Andor in Disney+'s "Star Wars" series "Andor."

Beef

It begins with an anti-meet cute: two strangers encounter each other in a parking lot, where it's hate at first sight. But Netflix's "Beef," created by Lee Sung Jin and produced by A24, knows that the opposite of love is indifference. What Amy (Ali Wong) and Danny (Steven Yeun) have is a real connection, one rooted in their shared alienation and how that feeling interacts with their Asian American backgrounds. The nature of that connection feels unique in the modern TV landscape, and how it plays out is fittingly unpredictable. Wong and Yeun's dual character study keeps us strapped in for the ride.

Dead Ringers

Rachel Weisz stars in this David Cronenberg remake as twins Beverly and Elliot Mantle, gynecologists who open a futuristic birthing center while navigating messy personal lives. Unlike most revivals, the Amazon Prime series is neither a lazy rehash nor a blatant cash grab; body horror centered on women's reproductive health is hardly a recipe for mass appeal. Instead, it's a platform for Weisz's remarkable dual performance and the spiky, strange, proudly perverse tone crafted by creator Alice Birch and her all-female writing team.

→ Rachel Weisz portrays twins in Amazon Prime Video's "Dead Ringers."

Los Espookys

In a just world, "Los Espookys" would be headed into a third season. In our world, the least the canceled HBO comedy deserves on the way out is an acknowledgment of how distinctive, creative, and above all, hilarious the show could be. Teaming up with Fred Armisen, writers Julio Torres and Ana Fabrega created a world that felt like the insides of their brains. The titular group are horror artists for hire, a perfectly rational profession in this alternate reality. Faced with effortlessly inventive choices like casting Yalitza Aparicio as the literal moon, fans have no choice but to simply go with it — even if HBO wouldn't.

Poker Face

Rian Johnson brings the flair of a film director and the enthusiasm of a TV nerd to this Peacock project, which stars Natasha Lyonne as a human lie detector. The procedural includes the predictable, comforting rhythm — and creativity within constraints — that

Beef: Andrew Cooper/Netflix; Andor: Des Willie/Lucasfilm Ltd.; Dead Ringers: Niko Tavernise/Prime Video

genre implies. It's also filled with major stars and gorgeous, arresting backdrops. "Poker Face" loves to shapeshift even as it's anchored by Lyonne, a modern Columbo rasping her way through America, one "bullshit!" at a time.

Queen Charlotte

Any prequel to "Bridgerton" would likely be a hit, but like the typical Shonda Rhimes protagonist, "Queen Charlotte" overachieves. The love story of a young German princess and England's King George III has basis in historical fact, as do the king's struggles with mental illness. Showrunner Rhimes still feels free to take liberty with the origins of the so-called Great Experiment in opening the aristocracy to people of color, adding to the series' stakes. This feels as realistic and lived-in a romance as Rhimes has ever crafted, and is all the more affecting for it.

The Rehearsal

Nathan Fielder knows that he makes you uncomfortable. This was the subtext of "Nathan for You," which used real people as props; with "The Rehearsal," Fielder puts the ethical tensions underlining his work in the spotlight's glare. In theory, it's about Fielder's character helping participants "rehearse" meticulously recreated aspects of their lives. In practice, "The Rehearsal" is about dismantling the illusion that Fielder can control the world around him and coerce other people without consequences. After the first season, you can't say much about Fielder he hasn't already said about himself.

Reservation Dogs

The FX series is a hangout comedy about kids coming of age on an economically depressed reservation. It's also an achingly sad study of grief and collective trauma, and the ability to combine the two is what makes the show truly special. The digressive structure, closer to connected vignettes than a fully serialized arc, helps "Reservation Dogs" keep its tone elastic, moving from a healthcare convention to a death vigil to a Santa Monica beach. On the anniversary of a friend's death, the namesake group finally experiences the catharsis needed to move on. Wherever they go next, it'll be worth watching.

↑ Natasha Lyonne plays human lie detector Charlie Cale in Peacock's "Poker Face."

Succession

Recommending "Succession" for the Emmys feels a bit like recommending air for your lungs. Inevitable as its victories may be, though, the final season has earned them, having shocked the world by killing off patriarch Logan Roy in an early episode. "Succession" can have a sitcom's love of repetition, but Logan's death unlocked new dimensions in its central relationships. Much like Logan, "Succession" is going out on top, but its characters are approaching rock bottom. There are always new depths to a billionaire's misery.

The White Lotus

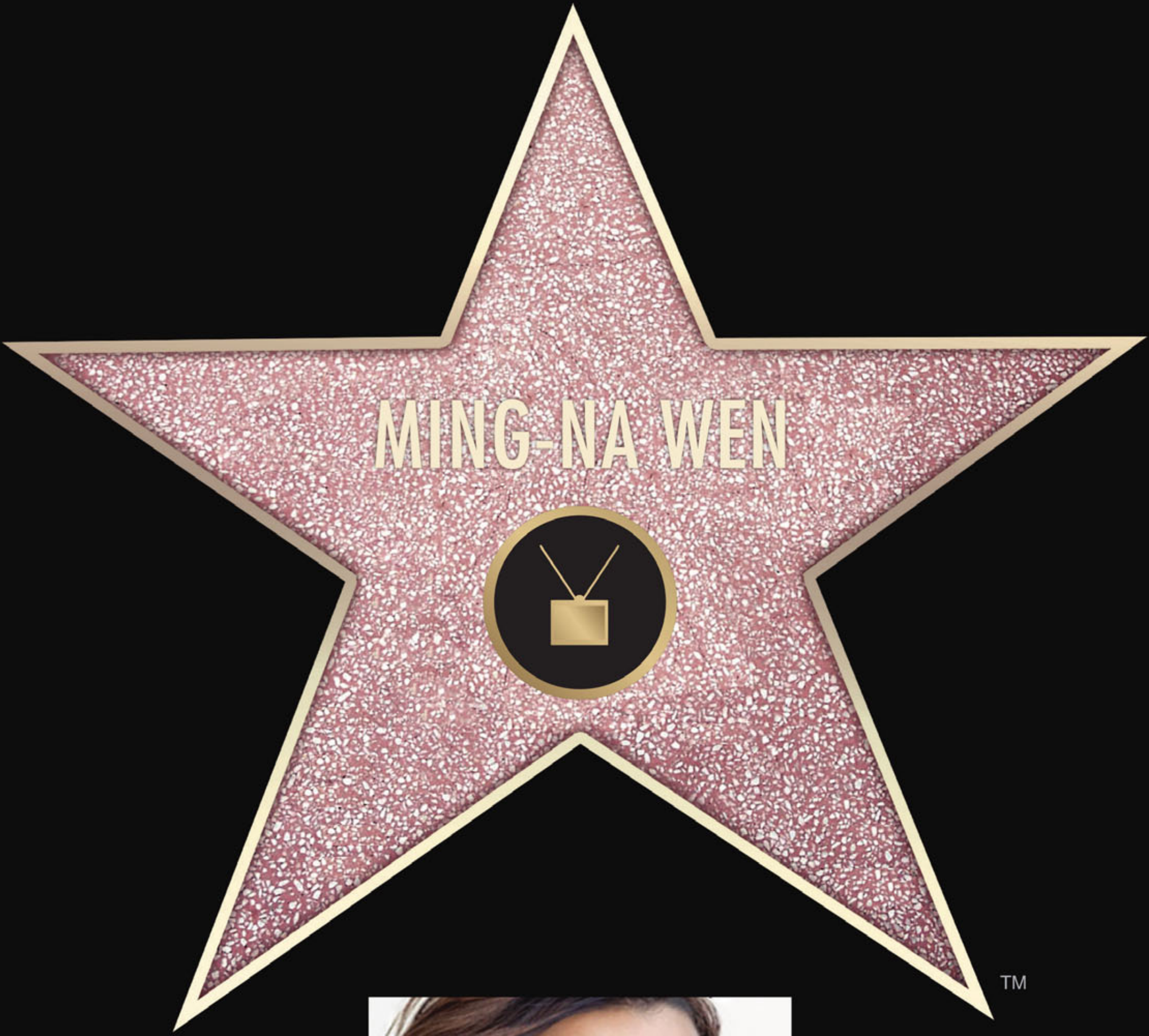
The first season became a surprise pandemic hit, so much so that HBO urged Mike White to turn his quarantine-friendly concept into a full-blown franchise. In Season 2, it set sail for Sicily, took over another location of the Four Seasons, and staged what the writer-director calls "a bedroom farce with teeth." "The White Lotus" is partly a murder mystery, an element Season 2 leaned on more heavily for suspense. But it's mostly a story about the everyday agonies we inflict on ourselves. It's an unlikely franchise, but one that's enabled career-best performances from actors including Jennifer Coolidge and Aubrey Plaza.

→ Awards favorite Jennifer Coolidge (here with Jon Gries) is a frontrunner for Season 2 of "The White Lotus."

← Jeremy Strong, Sarah Snook and Kieran Culkin all shine in the final season of "Succession."

Poker Face: Karolina Wojtasik/Peacock; Succession: Graeme Hunter/HBO; Fabio Lovino/HBO

TUESDAY, MAY 30 AT 11:30AM PDT



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FOCUS

Joy, Luck and Talent

Ming-Na Wen continues breaking ground with a star on the Walk of Fame • *By Jenelle Riley*

→ Wen isn't just an actor in her projects — she's also a fan.

Philip Faraone/Getty Images

Since she was a child, Ming-Na Wen has been a "Star Wars" fan. "To this day, whenever I get on a plane," she says, "I still pray to God, Buddha and The Force."

And while might be cliché to open a profile of Wen by saying The Force is strong with her — when Lucasfilm's own Dave Filoni invokes the phrase, it would be wrong not to do so.

Long before Wen was playing bounty hunter Fennec Shand on "The Mandalorian" or its spinoff "The Book of Boba Fett," she and Filoni attended the same high school in a Pittsburgh suburb. And he says both have always loved "Star Wars." Says Filoni, "Working with Ming-Na Wen has been full of surprises. The Force is definitely strong with her. Always has been."

Other actors can boast about being part of the "Star Wars" universe or playing a Disney princess or having characters in both the Marvel Cinematic Universe and the DC Universe. But few, if any, can lay claim to being involved with all of them in their career. And Wen isn't just an actor — she's a self-proclaimed fan. One who can't stop grinning from ear to ear when she talks about seeing Mark Hamill on the set of "Boba Fett" and calls winning the Saturn Award, awarded to sci-fi and genre work, her Oscar.

"Can I show you proof of my geekiness?" Wen asks during a Zoom conversation before panning her computer camera to display a wall lined with action figures of her characters from the different fandoms. "And this isn't narcissism, this is just me being so freaking excited. I still pinch myself; it doesn't make any sense. I mean, I won the Golden Ticket."

Adding to her many honors and achievements, Wen will be receiving a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame on May 30. And it's an event she can't quite wrap her head around. "I'm so honored but I don't feel worthy of it," she says. "I'm literally having anxiety dreams about it."

When she started out, Wen briefly wondered if she should anglicize her name. Becoming a mother shifted her priorities from being so focused on career, and she hasn't had a personal publicist in more than 20 years. So, while she feels a little strange having the spotlight on her, Wen also knows it's about more than just herself.

↑ (Clockwise from top) Wen, second from left, with the cast of the 1993 film "The Joy Luck Club"; "Mulan"; in "The Book of Boba Fett."

Joy Luck Club: Buena Vista Pictures/Everett Collection; Book of Boba Fett: Disney+; Walt Disney Co./Everett Collection

"I have to take myself out of it and see the bigger picture of what this really means," she says. "If someone is walking over that star and they see it's an Asian American name, a Chinese name, what does that represent? How can it inspire others?" She points to the recent Academy Awards, where the Asian immigrant story "Everything Everywhere All at Once" swept the show. "We've come a long way, and thank goodness, because it's been a long time coming," says Wen.

Wen acknowledges that growing up, she didn't see many names like hers on television or in movies. Born in China, she and her family moved to New York when Wen was only four years old. She started doing school plays and can remember being on stage in third grade and making people laugh. "That's when I was hooked," she says. A few years later, the family moved to the Pittsburgh area, which Wen describes as a culture shock. But Mount Lebanon High School also had an excellent theater program and then Wen was accepted into the prestigious Carnegie Mellon University, where she majored in theater.

After working in New York theater and a three-year stint on daytime drama "As the World Turns," Wen was cast in her major career breakthrough role. She played June Woo in "The Joy Luck Club," the 1993 adaptation of the best-selling book by Amy Tan centering on the relationships between four Chinese American women and their mothers. Wen refers to the movie, a critical and box office hit at the time, as "my citizenship into Hollywood."

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> **“**
>
> **Originally the character of Fennec was going to die but after working with Ming-Na, we decided that couldn’t happen.” — Dave Filoni**

↑ Wen appeared in the first season of “ER” then later returned to the medical drama.

The movie “opened up a whole other world that I didn’t realize existed, let alone was available,” she says now. “Everything from meeting all these other incredible Asian actors to this community that I didn’t even know about. I was living the dream.”

She also formed lifelong friendships with the three other actors who played the daughters — Rosalind Chao, Lauren Tom and Tamlyn Tomita. Chao remembers her initial impression of Wen all those years ago. “From day one, on set and off, she exuded confidence and a great business sense,” recalls Chao. “In fact, my husband played poker with the girls off set and Ming cleaned them all out.”

Wen would absolutely be on board for Hyde Park Entertainment Group’s recently announced sequel to “The Joy Luck Club.” “It would be very exciting,” she says. “Although, if you get the four of us together, I don’t know if we’ll get anything done because we’ll be laughing so much.”

After “The Joy Luck Club,” Wen joined the cast of the hit series “ER” as Dr. Jing-Mei “Deb” Chen and became the first Disney princess of Asian descent by voicing the lead in “Mulan,” recently making a cameo appearance in the 2020 live-action adaptation. She joined other popular fandoms with roles in projects such as “Street Fighter,” “Marvel’s Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.” and voiced Detective Ellen Yin in “The Batman.”

And then there’s her role as Fennec Shand, an integral “Mandalorian” character also seen in the animated series “Star Wars: The Bad Batch.” Though Filoni has long been involved with the ‘Star Wars’ universe, he made his live-action directing debut with episodes of “The Mandalorian.” Says Filoni, “Ming-Na and I would sit together and discuss each line, her backstory, where in the galaxy she had been, and where she might be going. She wanted to know everything about Fennec.”

In fact, Filoni reveals, “Originally the character of Fennec was going to die, but after working with Ming-Na we decided that couldn’t happen. She was too valuable to ‘Star Wars’ both on- and off- screen. We found a way for her to survive and I’m happy to say the character lives on.”

Wen pauses when asked about her biggest challenges before noting that playing talent agent Janet Stone on the hit comedy “Hacks” initially “terrified” her. “It had been a while since I’d done comedy and I was such a huge fan of the show,” Wen reveals.

Lucia Aniello, the co-creator, co-showrunner and director of “Hacks,” says that was part of the appeal in casting Wen. “On ‘Hacks’ we love to showcase actors in ways they’re not usually known for,” Aniello reveals. “We were looking for someone who had the gravitas of a ball-busting Hollywood heavyweight, and she came to set knowing exactly who this woman was. Maybe it was because she’s been in the business long enough to know these women, but it felt so perfect — banging tables, laughing with her mouth open — it was so fun to watch her be so free and play.”

In addition to her work as an actor, Wen is currently at work on a cookbook with Simon Element, an imprint of Simon & Schuster. The daughter of chefs, Wen was a foodie long before the term existed. “It’s going to also be a journey through my culture, my food and my family through all these dishes,” she notes.

But first, she’ll have to get through that star ceremony, something she still is struggling to accept. “I’m being honored in the most remarkable way,” she says. “And all I’m doing is living out my biggest nerd dreams.”

← Wen (with Dianne Doan) spent seven seasons on “Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.” and currently appears on “Hacks” (with Paul W. Downs).

TIPSHEET

WHAT: Ming-Na Wen receives a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame
WHEN: 11:30 a.m., May 30
WHERE: 6840 Hollywood Blvd.
WEB: www.walkoffame.com

The Mandalorian: Justin Lubin/Lucasfilm Ltd.; Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.: ABC/Getty Images; Hacks: Karen Ballard/HBO Max

REVIEWS

Killers of the Flower Moon

By Peter Debruge

FILM REVIEW

Director: Martin Scorsese

Starring: Leonardo DiCaprio, Lily Gladstone, Robert De Niro

Robert De Niro and Leonardo DiCaprio star in “Killers of the Flower Moon.”

Melinda Sue Gordon/AppleTV+

Taking a cue from the movie’s soon-to-be-infamous spanking scene between Robert De Niro and Leonardo DiCaprio, someone ought to paddle whoever let Martin Scorsese take three and a half hours to retell “Killers of the Flower Moon.” You could read David Grann’s page-turner — about an audacious 1920s conspiracy to steal resources from the Osage people by marriage and murder — in less time, and you’d learn a whole lot more about how J. Edgar Hoover and the newly formed FBI used this case to establish their place in American law enforcement.

Granted, this is cinema legend Martin Scorsese we’re talking about. For years, he fought studio execs telling him what to cut, going head-to-head with Harvey Weinstein on “Gangs of New York” (a movie that probably would’ve been better longer). Now he’s earned the right to tell stories as he sees fit. Trouble is, at 206 minutes, “Killers of the Flower Moon”

Lily Gladstone on set with director Martin Scorsese

Melinda Sue Gordon/AppleTV+

isn't an epic motion picture so much as a miniseries. Closer to two hours, "Killers" would make a killing, whereas longer than "The Longest Day," most folks will wait to watch at home.

This is why someone needs to tell Marty to rein it in. They should've done it before he started shooting, since the pace is built in, and Scorsese's projects don't compress well after the fact. In its present form, "Killers" is still a compelling true story, one that Scorsese and co-writer Eric Roth shifted from being a standard white-savior detective yarn to a morally thorny look at how the white culprits plotted and carried out the murders. Stylistically, it's engrossing from the get-go. But it keeps going and going until everyone we care about is dead, dying or behind bars, with nearly an hour in store.

Years earlier, the tribe had been forced by the U.S. government to relinquish its ancestral homelands and relocate to undesirable Oklahoma land, where it got rich when oil was discovered beneath its feet.

Scorsese opens on prosperous times for the Osage, who'd become the wealthiest Americans per capita, thanks to the oil derricks that cover their land. That made them targets to be exploited. Early on, the director draws a direct line between the Osage Murders and the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre — both cases in which white supremacists couldn't stand to see others prosper, counting on a biased legal system to cover their crimes.

Taking a page from "Goodfellas," Scorsese runs through half a dozen suspicious deaths right upfront, dismissed without investigation, including a "suicide" where we see someone shoot an Osage woman through the chest, then restage the scene by placing the gun near her hand. That's the climate into which DiCaprio's character, Ernest Burkhart, moves to Fairfax, Okla., where he soon finds himself participating in the killings. Ernest's first stop off the train is his uncle William "King" Hale's place, where the well-connected cattleman (played by De Niro) welcomes him to town, glad to have the perfect patsy.

Ernest doesn't realize it, but the scheme is underway. For it to work, King needs his nephew to marry Mollie Kyle (Lily Gladstone), an Osage woman who's too sharp not to recognize a gold digger, but too trusting to imagine just how sinister her suitor's intentions may be. Almost right away, her relatives start dying of suspicious causes. With each death, the family fortunes flow toward Mollie, whose headrights can legally pass to her husband, if she so bequeaths it — all as King had foreseen.

Gladstone is so sympathetic as Mollie, we cringe as Ernest slowly poisons her with tainted insulin. DiCaprio has never gone this far to the dark side, daring us to follow along as Ernest bumbles his way through a stone-cold, "Gaslight"-style plot to steal his wife's fortune. Instead of telegraphing his duplicity, De Niro lays on the charm — though King's actions suggest that every line might be uttered with fingers crossed behind his back.

The obvious way to tell this story — the one Grann took for his book — would be as a criminal investigation. But the movie asks audiences to identify with the killers, while showing how this conspiracy impacted the Osage Nation. On a couple occasions, Scorsese takes us inside tribal council meetings, where Native spokesmen complain that no one cares about the murders in their midst. If they want the deaths investigated, they'll have to pay for it themselves. When they send a representative to Washington, D.C., that man is bludgeoned to death. And when Hoover dispatches a former Texas Ranger, Tom White (Jesse Plemons), Ernest and King hardly give him the time of day.

White eventually cracked the case, much to the FBI's glory, though that part of the film nearly grinds to a halt as Mollie teeters on death's precipice. Scorsese constructs the drawn-out climax around Ernest's choice: Will he protect King to the bitter end, or will he testify against his uncle and maybe save Mollie in the process?

Instead of following the courtroom drama to its natural conclusion, longtime editor Thelma Schoonmaker cuts to a Technicolor epilogue, as a Hoover-endorsed radio show summarizes what happened. It's a brusque way to wrap a film that's taken its time, and a reminder that no one is telling Scorsese no — because if this device were an option, it could have kicked in an hour earlier.

CREDITS: An Apple TV+, Paramount release and presentation of an Apple Studios, Imperative Entertainment, Sikelia Prods., Appian Way Prods. production. **Producers:** Martin Scorsese, Dan Friedkin, Bradley Thomas, Daniel Lupi. **Executive producers:** Leonardo DiCaprio, Rick Yorn, Adam Somner, Marianne Bower, Lisa Frechette, John Atwood, Shea Kammer, Niels Juul. **Director:** Martin Scorsese. **Screenplay:** Eric Roth, Scorsese, based on the nonfiction book by David Grann. **Camera:** Rodrigo Prieto. **Editor:** Thelma Schoonmaker. **Music:** Robbie Robertson. Reviewed at Christine 21, Paris, May 12, 2023. In Cannes Film Festival (noncompeting). **MPA Rating:** PG-13. **Running time:** 98 MIN. **Cast:** Leonardo DiCaprio, Robert De Niro, Lily Gladstone, Jesse Plemons, John Lithgow, Brendan Fraser, Tantoo Cardinal, Cara Jade Myers, JaNae Collins, Jillian Dion, William Belleau, Louis Cancelmi, Tatanka Means

Asteroid City

By Owen Gleiberman

FILM REVIEW

Director: Wes Anderson

Starring: Jason Schwartzman, Scarlett Johansson, Tom Hanks

As much as any filmmaker alive, Wes Anderson has a canon of movies that look and feel all of a piece. The diorama design, which extends from his life-size-dollhouse sets to his graphic lettering; the acting so stylized it's like postmodern jokey-music-video kabuki; the fable-within-a-fable structure that can seem the cinematic equivalent of nested Russian dolls; the heavy frosting of ironic whimsicality. Most of his movies share these elements, yet the truth is that not all Wes Anderson films are alike. A few, like "The Royal Tenenbaums" and "Fantastic Mr. Fox," spin finely wrought tales beneath the filigree. One, "The Grand Budapest Hotel," is an exhilarating caper — as well as (to me) his finest work, ironically because it isn't pretending to be about anything.

Then there are the Anderson films even most of his fans don't pretend to like all that much — the fussy, top-heavy, narratively batty yet stretched-thin concoctions like "The Darjeeling Limited" and "The Life Aquatic With Steve Zissou." "Asteroid City," Anderson's 11th film, is one of those, only more so.

Set in a tiny red-rock Southwest Americana desert town in 1955, it may be the director's most intricately ornate and fetishistic piece of world-building. Watching the movie, one glories for a while in the retro kitsch nostalgia and sheer imaginative play that went into the creation of Atomic City (pop. 87), with its '40s-meets-'50s diner and motor court and one-pump gas station, its mesas that look like they're made out of balsa wood, its occasional scrubby cactus, its giant meteorite crater and its intermittent atomic-bomb-test mushroom cloud that goes off in the distance. There are some good jokes, like the row of vending machines that includes one that sells plots of land, as well as archly obvious ones, like the police-versus-crooks car chases that occasionally rip through town.

From top: Steve Carell, Aristou Meehan and Liev Schreiber; Scarlett Johansson; and Jake Ryan, Jason Schwartzman and Tom Hanks in "Asteroid City"

Pop. 87 Productions/Focus Features (3)

But if the setting of "Asteroid City" feels succulent in that vintage Anderson way, the scenes and events that unfold there do not. They add up to what may be the filmmaker's most hyperactive yet coyly obtuse piece of storytelling. There are only a few main characters, but everyone in the movie seems to be reciting from the same turgidly empty-clever Anderson playbook. Jason Schwartzman, in a beard that blands him out, plays Augie Steenbeck, who gets stranded in town after his car breaks down. His wife has just died (he's toting her ashes in Tupperware), and he's got their four children with him, the oldest of whom, the doleful "brainiac" geek Woodrow (Jake Ryan), is like a one-note knockoff of Max in "Rushmore."

"Asteroid City" presents itself as a sardonic meditation on grief, though it's not the kind that anyone's going to shed a tear over. As military officers and astronomers, including the technobabble-happy Dr. Hickenlooper (Tilda Swinton), gather to honor the achievements of the Junior Stargazers (of which Woodrow is one), Augie's crusty father-in-law (Tom Hanks) shows up, and so does Midge Campbell (Scarlett Johansson), an actress with short brown hair, orange lipstick and her own hostile hauteur. Did I mention that the lead characters are, at the same time, stage actors who are "playing" these very same roles back in New York in a black-and-white teleplay called "Asteroid City," presented by The Host (Bryan Cranston)? If your reaction to that is "Huh?" you won't be alone.

At one point, an alien shows up with a disarming look that consists of popping white eyes and skin that seems like it was made out of a black shower curtain. He disappears in his flying saucer as quickly as he arrived, but this extraterrestrial visit results in Asteroid City being placed under quarantine, which means that everyone who has come to town is trapped there. The audience will know just how that feels. "Asteroid City" looks smashing, but as a movie it's for Anderson die-hards only, and maybe not even too many of them.

CREDITS: A Focus Features release of a Focus Features, Indian Paintbrush, American Empirical Picture production. **Producers:** Wes Anderson, Steven Rales, Jeremy Dawson. **Executive producers:** Roman Coppola, Henning Molfenter, Christoph Fisse, Charlie Woebeken. **Director, writer:** Wes Anderson. **Camera:** Robert Yeoman. **Editors:** Barney Pilling, Andrew Weisblum. **Music:** Alexandre Desplat. **MPA Rating:** PG-13. **Running time:** 104 MIN. **Cast:** Jason Schwartzman, Scarlett Johansson, Tom Hanks, Jake Ryan, Jeffrey Wright, Tilda Swinton, Bryan Cranston, Edward Norton, Adrien Brody, Hong Chau, Liev Schreiber, Hope Davis, Grace Edwards, Aristou Meehan, Sophia Lillis, Jeff Goldblum

Niall Horan

"If I made this album four years ago, I probably wouldn't have written some of those songs."

By Mike Wass

Christian Tierney

The road from boy-band fame to solo stardom is notoriously bumpy, but Niall Horan made the transition look easy with 2017's "Flicker." Eschewing the pop of One Direction for earthier, singer-songwriter fare, the Irishman carved out his own identity — one hit at a time. Sophomore albums can be tricky in the best of circumstances, but Horan's "Heartbreak Weather" arrived just as the world shut down for the COVID-19 pandemic. Promotion ground to a halt, and a planned tour was scrapped.

With time unexpectedly on his hands, Horan looked inward and started writing "The Show." The album, due June 9 via Capitol Records, finds the hitmaker laying his feelings bare as he comes to grips with the highs and lows of adulthood, and includes the hook-heavy "Heaven," which has amassed more than 105 million streams on Spotify. To promote the release, Horan announced a 30-plus-date U.S. tour and signed on as a judge for the latest season of "The Voice" — a full-circle moment from his discovery by Simon Cowell on the U.K.'s "The X Factor."

● **"Heartbreak Weather" dropped a week before the world shut down. Do we need to stock up on toilet paper for the arrival of "The Show"?** Jesus Christ. I hope not! That was a strange time to release an album — not being able to travel with it, and then the tour that we rehearsed never happened. But getting back into the studio, I think you can hear the time we took on it.

→
Things you didn't know about Niall Horan

Age: 29

Hometown: Mullingar, Ireland

Tee time: He loves golf, and says if he had more time, he might be a scratch player.

● **The album is contemplative at times. Was it difficult to open up?** If I made this album four years ago, I probably wouldn't have written some of those songs. I think it's just growing up. The pandemic was a good time for me to reflect on everything that had happened up until that point. I guess it is quite contemplative, but there's fun stuff too.

● **How do you deal with the weight of expectations?** It's scary, man. But I'm not afraid of a bit of hard work. I have no problem getting myself out there and trying to get the best out of it. I spend a year or more on the songs, so I want the best outcome possible. You just have to keep your fingers crossed and hope for the fucking best.

● **Do you get flashbacks to your One Direction days on "The Voice"?** Yeah, it's very weird. I was like, "Do I want to go back into that? Isn't that something from my past?" But then I thought, "Fuck it. It'll be a great laugh." The way they run that show is amazing, and I got very lucky with the other coaches with the banter we have on and off camera. …

The second I met Blake Shelton, I knew straight away I was going to get on with him. We've got a very similar sense of humor, very sarcastic. He gives zero fucks. This is his last season, so if I do another one, I'm going to miss him.

● **With COVID precluding your last tour, you must be chomping at the bit to play live again.** It's the best part of what we do. Getting out there every night, feeling that feeling, playing tunes that you've written, hearing them sung back, there's no feeling that can replace it. This is my public service announcement to people that like my album: Please buy a ticket.

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